

# MASTEROPPGAVE

The Educational Value of the Fantasy Genre in the  
Norwegian Upper-Secondary ESL Classroom: A  
Literature Review

Patrick Myhrvang

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Masterstudium i fremmedspråk i skolen  
Avdeling for økonomi, språk og samfunnsfag



## **Abstract**

As the cultural, social, and digital influences of the 21st century continue to alter different aspects of Norwegian society, children and young adults alike are constantly subjected to a multitude of dynamic changes and developments in popular culture. Through their involvement and experiences with various facets of this culture, young ESL students encounter the traditional concept of storytelling across various media, and become acquainted with the multifaceted nature of narratives. Consequently, the transmedia-influenced features of contemporary youth culture have provided a solid foundation for the growing popularity of fantasy portrayals among young readers, and the success of the genre raises questions regarding the educational potential of fantasy as a didactic tool in foreign language teaching.

In accordance with these developments, this thesis attempts to reveal what current international research says about the educational potential and didactic possibilities of popular culture (e.g. the fantasy genre) in transmedial formats, with an emphasis on language acquisition. Further, the research is related to the English subject curriculum presented in the Norwegian National Curriculum - The Knowledge Promotion 2006, and implications the research might have for Norwegian ESL teaching is discussed. Five key concepts, namely narrative theory, fantasy, transmedia storytelling, language acquisition, and multiliteracies, were used to construct a literature review that aims to answer the following research questions: 1) "What does current international research say about the uses of popular culture (e.g., the fantasy genre) in transmedial formats as an educational tool, especially in terms of language acquisition?" and 2) "How can the literature reviewed here be related to the English subject curriculum presented in the Norwegian National Curriculum – The Knowledge Promotion 2006, and what implications does it have for Norwegian ESL teaching?" This desk-based research indicates that popular material such as fantasy narratives does have an educational potential in the ESL classroom, and further implies that the use of contemporary material in academic settings may help students to develop both linguistically and emotionally, while continually aiding them in meeting the aims set out for them in the national curriculum.

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# **1. Introduction: Connecting the pupils’ “Lifeworlds” with the “ESL world” in Norwegian upper- secondary school**

“Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It’s a way of understanding it”

– Lloyd Alexander (Attributed to Alexander in Hamilton 4)

In the midst of the media infused surroundings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Norwegian society has witnessed the emergence of a myriad of cultural, social, and digital changes brought about by technological developments and globalization. Whether the cultural impact of these changes ought to be construed positively or negatively will always be a matter of perspective; however, technology’s seemingly unfaltering grip on cultural practices has become a widely debated subject. As the fabric of culture is altered and shaped by global influences, Norwegian youths are accordingly exposed to a multitude of linguistic and cultural experiences. Through their practices and involvement with aspects of popular culture, children and young adults alike encounter different acts of storytelling across multiple media formats and subsequently experience the multifaceted nature of narrativity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, the transmedia-influenced practices of popular culture have also ushered in a growing popularity of fantasy narratives, which have been embraced and admired by many young readers worldwide. Accordingly, in view of these cultural developments, I believe the multifaceted nature of fantasy, in conjunction with the cultural prosperity of the genre, may serve as a latent didactic tool in foreign language teaching.

Hence, in this thesis I will argue for and discuss the educational value of the fantasy genre in a Norwegian English as a second language (hereafter referred to as ESL) setting. I believe the genre has the potential to act as a bridge between the academic ESL culture that students encounter at school, and the recreational experiences of students’ everyday life. In order to support this argument, I will carry out a literature review of current, authoritative texts that discuss how technological change and popular culture impinge on different aspects of literacy and language acquisition. I have chosen a number of key words to guide my search for this literature, drawing on the core aims of the Norwegian National Curriculum for upper-secondary school and the English subject curriculum. These keywords are: Narrative Theory, Fantasy, Transmedia Storytelling, Language Acquisition, and Multiliteracies. While these keywords all represent different areas of study, each area embodies miscellaneous ideas and notions which

together provide a comprehensive selection of noteworthy research and literature. Consequently, each keyword, along with its respective research area, was selected due to two key considerations; the first being the distinct nature of each area, and the second being the possible connections that may be drawn between the different areas.

## **1.1 Background**

Although I have never outgrown my childhood fascination with fantasy, or forgot my love of storytelling, my relationship to the fantasy genre was merely that of adolescent admiration until my curiosity was ignited by my experiences as a young ESL teacher. During discussions with my students, both inside and outside of the classroom, many shared their personal experiences with the fantasy genre across different media, and connected these experiences to their own recreational uses of English. Whether their experiences were related to novels, graphic novels, films, television series, or video games, the genre was a topic of interest for many, and fantasy seemed to have established a foothold within their own youth culture. While my students might not have been aware of it, their experiences with transmedia storytelling mirrored much of my own development, and reminded me how I too once developed a fascination with storytelling and fantasy, and became captivated by the allure of my digital surroundings. Hence, as a point of departure, I would like to share an earlier experience which helped lead the way to some of the ideas explored in this thesis.

Some nights ago, while browsing through the digital mess I now call my computer; I remembered something my mother used to say to me while I was growing up. “If you sit by that computer anymore now, your eyes are bound to turn square at some point”. Although I never found her attempt at a joke amusing before, it now somehow managed to put a smile on my face, so I decided to close my computer for the time being. As the light disappeared from the screen in front of me, the music in my earplugs went silent, and the conversations I was just having with my friends abruptly ended. As I went off to bed, like a creature of habit I grabbed my phone, knowing that I would want to browse the news or play a game or two before the night could finally claim me. As I drifted off to sleep, I knew that tomorrow I would see another day, through a pair of eager, “square” eyes. In many ways, I am a typical product of the digital age, part of a generation once thought lost to the growth of technology; I am what Marc Prensky defines as a “Digital Native” (Prensky 1).

Whether or not it is justifiable to categorize the complex nature of human beings with all-embracing labels such as Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants is a matter of debate; however,

there is no denying that many younger members of our society have adapted to their digital surroundings with ease. To use my mother's witticism to paint a picture, the students who are currently attending schools all across Norway are products of the digital age; they are members of a "squared-eyed generation". While the notion of "square-eyed" has traditionally been used as a metaphorical description of the negative effects of obsessive screen gazing, I propose a different way of interpreting this metaphor. Imagine the concept "square-eyed" not as an effect, but rather as a perspective, a perspective that has been brought about by the cultural, social, and digital changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A "square-eyed perspective" is not something that one deliberately chooses, nor is it an adolescent protest against our culture's traditional norms; it is merely a natural result of growing up within a media and technology dominated society. While technological advancements have had both positive and negative effects on Norwegian students' cultural practices, a "square-eyed perspective" does not necessarily make the nation's youth lose touch with reality, it aids them in adapting to the changes that are occurring around them.

One of my most memorable encounters with the square-eyed perspective of students occurred while I was teaching an ESL class at a Norwegian lower secondary school, where a young student displayed a remarkable linguistic knowledge, partly influenced by his own recreational experiences with media and technology. In the midst of a classroom discussion on medieval folklore and the adventures of Robin Hood, I asked the class what a treasure usually consists of. I expected a traditional or conventional answer, such as gold or riches, but a young boy surprised me by displaying a remarkable grasp of the names of different gems. His listing of vocabulary words such as ruby, emerald, and sapphire, went well beyond the glossary assigned in the chapter we were studying, and was surprisingly diverse for a student his age. While gems are not a common topic of everyday conversation, they are nevertheless a natural element in many types of video games, and the student's response reminded me particularly of the common usage of gems in fantasy role-playing games. In light of this, I asked the student if he had any experience with these types of video games, which he quickly confirmed. After the lesson was completed, I was left pondering whether this student's informal experiences with popular culture had somehow contributed to his acquisition of English, and whether different transmedial portrayals of fantasy could be valuable resources to explore further in the English classroom.

Ultimately, through a combination of different experiences, such as my own adolescent love of the genre, and my observations of students' pop cultural involvements and practices, I was led



to a hypothesis that advocated for the educational value of the fantasy genre. While my hypothesis approached the positive aspects of working with fantasy material in the ESL classroom and justified the didactic use of the genre by relating it to the aims of the Norwegian national curriculum, I also questioned whether the genre could serve as a potential bridge between the students' recreational experiences with English, and the academic setting of the ESL classroom. In order to research and possibly verify my hypothesis, I carried out a pilot study at a Norwegian upper secondary school, which aimed to explore ESL students' opinions about the fantasy genre in regard to both academic and recreational settings (Myhrvang, unpublished term paper 2014). While primarily addressing the participants' opinions and thoughts regarding the fantasy genre, the study likewise alluded to the genre's potential influences on language acquisition (Ibid). The 20 participants who took part in the study were all attending their first year of upper secondary school, and were part of the "Education Programme for Specialization in General Studies". They were almost evenly distributed in terms of gender, and ranged between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. Over the course of one week, various data were gathered and processed using qualitative research methods, primarily a written questionnaire and a focus group interview.

The general nature of the questionnaire, combined with the in depth structure of the focus group interview provided both nuanced and intriguing data, which supported many of my initial ideas and assumptions. The majority of the participants who answered the questionnaire confirmed that they had daily exposure to the English language through the various media outlets of popular culture, and further expressed a distinct familiarity with the fantasy genre, which for many had become a recurring element in everyday life. Furthermore, many participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the apparent lack of fantasy material in the ESL classroom, and said they would like to see more of the genre in their future classes.

Although there were differences among the participants concerning their personal preferences and daily habits, all nevertheless agreed on the positive linguistic influences of both literature and media, and confirmed their belief in the educational potential of the fantasy genre as a tool for English learning. Whereas the questionnaire enabled the participants to express their opinions and experiences briefly in writing, the focus group interview further enabled a selection of the participants to partake in an in depth discussion. The discussion revealed that the participants were fascinated by the diversity of the genre, which granted them a much needed "escape from reality" while also allowing them to connect to different themes and characters. The participants' experiences also revealed that they had all become acquainted with

the genre through different media, and several participants had been inspired to explore literary works of fantasy after first being introduced to film adaptations. Overall, the collected data demonstrated how the genre had become a common feature in their recreational lives as well as within their own culture.

However, in terms of generalizability (McKay 14), the results of the study merely represented the values and attitudes of these selected participants. The size of the sample means that it is not possible to draw any wider conclusions regarding other students without further research to test the validity, reliability, and generalizability of my findings (Myhrvang). Nevertheless, the collected data provide an indication of the possible cultural and linguistic impact of the fantasy genre on ESL students, and indicate that the genre has become a common feature within different aspects of youth culture.

In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the Norwegian core curriculum states that “the school must find the difficult balance between stimulating and exploiting the culture the young themselves create, and forming a counterweight to it” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training A 31). This general aim provides a justification for including elements of the students’ own youth culture in the ESL classroom, and describes how school can and should be an institution where classical and popular culture can merge. A successful symbiosis of the two may provide the students with the benefits of both worlds of English language exposure, and consequently aid them in developing their linguistic and communicative competence.

However, in order to unite the traditional and the popular in a beneficial pedagogic setting, a common denominator must be located and integrated into the classroom. As my earlier research has provided positive indications regarding students’ perception of the fantasy genre in both academic and recreational settings, I firmly believe fantasy can serve as this denominator. By incorporating the genre in the ESL classroom, and letting students work with and explore transmedial fantasy narratives in an academic setting, I believe many can be helped towards meeting a number of the goals stipulated in the Norwegian National Curriculum and the English subject curriculum in terms of the basic skills and multiliteracies. Hence, I decided to carry out a literature review of current, international research which theorizes the new literacies students are in need of today due to rapid technological changes, and to evaluate these theories in relation to the Norwegian ESL context.

## **1.2 Central Concepts**

Some of the key words I chose to guide my literature search and investigate my topic were: Narrative Theory, Fantasy, Transmedia Storytelling, Language Acquisition, and Multiliteracies. I will define and elaborate on these keywords in Section 3 and in the literature review itself.

## **1.3. Outline of Thesis**

While the foundation of this thesis was primarily inspired by earlier data collected through qualitative research (Myhrvang), this dissertation will be an entirely theoretically based paper. Hence, rather than emphasizing classroom based research, I will make use of a desk-based research method, where I describe and evaluate what is already known about my concepts by employing secondary sources such as books, articles, and encyclopedia entries (Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey 74). The various materials, which are collected through a personal selection process, will serve as points of departure for pedagogical discussions that explore different issues and attempt to answer my proposed research questions.

In the upcoming sections, section two and three, I will briefly introduce my research questions, before I elaborate on the key concepts that will be discussed in the literature review. Within each key concept, I will present the theoretical framework by introducing the main texts that will be used, and additionally present some of the definitions that will be employed throughout the paper. In the fourth section, the methods used to locate and evaluate sources will be presented, and both the strengths and weaknesses of these methods will be briefly discussed. The fifth section will consist of the literature review, and the sixth and seventh sections will compose of a brief discussion and a conclusion respectively.

## **2. Research questions**

### **2.1. Aim of thesis**

The primary aims of this thesis are to shed light on the educational value of the fantasy genre in the ESL context, and to examine and discuss the potential educational benefits of working with different elements of popular culture in the ESL classroom. I have formulated two research

questions, and in order to answer these I will carry out a literature review using current articles and books covering my key concepts: the fantasy genre, narrative theory, transmedia storytelling, multiliteracies and language acquisition. I will relate what this literature says to my research questions and to the context of ESL teaching in Norwegian upper-secondary school. My research questions are as follows:

1. What does current international research say about the uses of popular culture (e.g., the fantasy genre) in transmedial formats as an educational tool, especially in terms of language acquisition?
2. How can the literature reviewed here be related to the English subject curriculum presented in the Norwegian National Curriculum – The Knowledge Promotion 2006 and what implications does it have for Norwegian ESL teaching?

### **3. Theory – Key Concepts**

This section will present the theoretical framework of the thesis, and introduce the key concepts and definitions which will be elaborated upon later in the literature review. I intend to focus primarily on the fantasy genre, narrative theory, transmedia storytelling, language acquisition, and multiliteracies. As mentioned earlier in the paper, these concepts were all selected due to different considerations. While each concept has a distinct nature with specific research that explores important aspects connected to my research questions, each concept is also connected to the others through different theories and ideas. Furthermore, each concept also addresses different areas of the English subject curriculum and the “Framework for basic skills”. The concepts Fantasy, Narrative Theory, and Language Acquisition all focus on topics and issues that fall under the traditional, main subject areas of the English subject curriculum “Language Learning”, “Oral communication”, “Written communication” and “Culture, society and literature” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training B). However, contrasting the traditional emphasis of these concepts, Transmedia storytelling and Multiliteracies relate to modern-day technological developments in society, which indicate that today’s students are required to develop new forms of literacy. These concepts can be related to the nature of the

basic skills defined in the “Framework for basic skills” presented by the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C).

### 3.1 Narrative Theory

As this thesis will examine the nature of narratives across media and discuss how narratives can influence students in various ways, it is necessary to introduce the multifaceted term “narrative”. While the notion of what constitutes a narrative has been widely debated within various academic circles for the past century, I have decided to use a definition presented in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, which defines a narrative as “an account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account.” (*OED Online*). However, while the definition provided by *The English Oxford Dictionary Online* presents a wide interpretation of what constitutes a narrative, I will further limit the concept within this thesis by emphasizing fictional narratives located within the fantasy genre. Although my primary focus will be restricted to one literary genre, it will not be limited to traditionally printed narratives, and will thus examine the concept of fantasy narratives across media.

Additionally, it is also necessary to provide a description of the comprehensive concept “storyworld”. As readers move between narratives in different media, they will eventually encounter different narrative universes, which consist of dynamic story arcs, characters, and settings. These universes are frequently referred to as “storyworlds”, and Australian writer Mike Jones has provided a brief description which reads “the Story-World represents the Rules; the governing principles and parameters by which occupants of the Story-World (characters and events) will adhere” (Jones no pages). However, while Jones’s description illustrates the general nature of a storyworld, the concept may also be construed in regard to readers’ cognitive interpretations. When encountering a storyworld, a reader will make use of his / her own experiences in their interpretations, and David Herman maintains that storyworlds can be understood as “mentally and emotionally projected environments in which interpreters are called upon to live out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative response” (Herman 570).

The review of the literature connected to narrative theory will begin with two articles from *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2010), namely “Narrative” by Marie-Laure Ryan and “Narrative Comprehension” by Catherine Emmott. While Ryan elaborates on the history

and nature of narratives, Emmott emphasizes cognitive aspects of narratology and aspects of narrative comprehension. The cognitive nature of reading is further discussed by Richard Gerrig in *Experiencing narrative worlds: On the psychological activities of reading* (1993), which introduces the concept of “Narrative transportation”. While Gerrig predominantly centers on aspects of reading, Melanie C. Green, Timothy C. Brock, and Geoff F. Kaufman elaborate on narrative transportation in “Understanding Media Enjoyment: The Role of Transportation Into Narrative Worlds” (2004), where they demonstrate that the act of transportation can occur regardless of modality of communication (312). Further, motivating aspects of texts are discussed in detail by Stephen Krashen in “The End of Motivation” (2015), where he draws parallels between motivating, comprehensible input and language acquisition. Finally, I briefly discuss how the ideas proposed in the various articles and books may influence the ESL classroom and potentially enhance the learning experience of students.

### **3.2 The Fantasy Genre**

The diversity and range of the fantasy genre have made it into one of the most ambiguous concepts in literary criticism, and literary scholars have yet to establish an extensive and sufficient definition (Nikolajeva 58). Although descriptions of the genre may differ depending on the sources examined, there are nevertheless some distinctive, reoccurring genre characteristics; e.g. the presence of magic, a departure from realism, the idea of secondary worlds, and the notion of suspension of disbelief (Nikolajeva 58, 60). However, within the framework of this thesis, I construe the concept of “fantasy” as broadly as possible; i.e., if a work of fiction contains fantastic elements that go beyond the traditional understanding of reality, it will be interpreted as fantasy material.

The upcoming review of texts connected to the fantasy genre will consist of encyclopedia entries, book chapters, and articles, and will emphasize the literary value of the fantasy genre, the development of fantasy in popular culture, as well as the use of fantasy material in the classroom. The review begins with a brief summary of the history of the genre presented through two articles written by Maria Nikolajeva and Edward James, entitled “Fantasy” and “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy”, which are available in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature* (2006) and *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012) respectively. Further, Brian Laetz and Joshua Johnston briefly allude to the dynamic, transmedial attributes of the genre in their article “What is fantasy?” (2008), before Nikolajeva elaborates on the nature and benefits of fantasy in literature. Next, the focus of the

review will shift from historical accounts and genre characteristics, towards the role of the fantasy genre in Scandinavian popular culture, which is briefly discussed by Irma Hirsjärvi in her article “Recognising the Fantasy Literature Genre” (2006). The premise described by Hirsjärvi, also mirrored some of the responses documented in my earlier research paper “The Potential of the Fantasy Genre in the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Upper Secondary ESL Classroom in Norway: What do the Pupils Think?” (Myhrvang 2014). Lastly, the review emphasizes the use of popular fantasy material in the classroom by reviewing three individual chapters of *Fantasy Media in the Classroom: Essays on Teaching with Film, Television, Literature, Graphic Novels and Video Games* (2012) namely, “Introduction” by Jim Ford, “Pop pedagogy” by Jesse Stallings, and “Added Interest, Added Value” by Laura Grey. Lastly, I conclude by connecting the authors’ arguments to the Norwegian ESL context.

### **3.3 Transmedia storytelling**

In terms of a descriptive approach to Transmedia storytelling as a concept, I will make use of a definition established by Henry Jenkins in “Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An annotated syllabus” (2010). The definition reads as follows: “Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins A 944).

The first articles discussed in the review on this topic were written by Daryoosh Hayati and Henry Jenkins, entitled “Transmedia Storytelling: A Study of the Necessity, Features and Advantages” (2012) and “Transmedia storytelling and Entertainment: An annotated syllabus” (2010) respectively. These articles focus primarily on the nature and advantages of transmedia storytelling. The second section focuses primarily on adaptation, with a particular emphasis on film, which is discussed through ideas presented in *Jakten på Fortellinger: Barne- og Ungdomslitteratur på Tvers av Medier* (2014) by Elise Seip Tønnessen and in Margaret Mackey’s entry “Media Adaptations” in *The Routledge Companion to Children’s Literature* (2010). The third section moves away from film adaptation in order to address the outer limits of narrative theory and storytelling, i.e. video games. While Espen Aarseth and Marie-Laure Ryan discuss the concept of narrativity in video games in their articles “Multi-path Narrative” and “Narratives, Games, and Play” located in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2010), Harry Brown’s *Video Games and Education* (2008) elaborates on the cognitive aspects of video games and contributes to the discussion of narrativity. Finally, the fourth section

presents the different modes of engagement presented in Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), which presents different ways of engaging with transmedial narratives.

### **3.4 Language acquisition**

As with the previous topics, the review of the material connected to language acquisition will be divided into separate sections, each emphasizing different aspects and elements of various language acquisition theories. The first section, which primarily addresses areas such as recreational linguistic exposure and the significance of linguistic input, draws on the ideas presented in *Engelsk Språkdidaktikk* (2009) by Bo Lundahl, and "Second Language Acquisition in Informal Setting" (2014) by Taher Bahrani, Tam Shu Sim, and Marziyeh Nekoueizadeh. While Lundahl's ideas emphasize Scandinavian second language learners, Bahrani et al. provide an elaborate review of numerous ideas presented within international research. Collectively both texts provide a detailed description of the nature of formal and informal language learning and outline the merits of both "Everyday language" and "School language".

In the next section, the focus shifts from formal and informal learning towards reading methods and the diverse nature of texts. In the introductory chapter to *Children's Literature in Second Language Education* (2012), Janice Bland discusses aspects of multimodality and argues for the use of multimodal text in second language classrooms. Bland's arguments focus on bridging the gap between the texts encountered within formal settings and the texts encountered within informal settings by different second language learners. Informal or recreational exposure to language through the act of reading is further discussed by Stephen Krashen. In "Free Voluntary reading: New Research, Applications, and Controversies" (2004), Krashen discusses the importance of recreational reading and argues that it influences the linguistic development of second language learners. I compare Krashen's argumentation for the educational potential of narrow reading to Aiden Chamber's concept of "flat-earth reading", and Sharon Bryan's "Extensive Reading, Narrow Reading and second language learners: implications for libraries" (2011), which argues for the merits of narrow reading by examining and reviewing earlier publications on the subject.

### **3.5 Multiliteracies**

The review of the literature attending to the subject of multiliteracies consists of numerous texts, and includes both book chapters as well as academic articles. The review begins with *Teaching and Learning Multiliteracies: Changing Times, Changing Literacies* (2006), by Michèle



Anstey and Geoff Bull, which provides a concise description of the history and nature of multiliteracies and argues for the benefits and possibilities of incorporating multiliteracies in didactic settings. The second section continues with Anstey and Bull's book, and turns the focus towards various researchers' ideas and theories regarding the relationship between learners' literacy and discourse worlds. The review continues with a discussion of aspects of another book by Anstey & Bull entitled *Evolving Pedagogies: Reading and Writing in a Multimodal World* (2010), which emphasizes how the diversity of texts has altered our perception of notions such as literacy, reading, and writing, and argues for the importance of having knowledge of, and being capable of using, all kinds of semiotic systems. Further, after a brief portrayal of the current state of literacy practices as presented by Ernest Morell and Bronwyn Williams, Susan Sandretto and Jane Tilson demonstrate the importance of establishing bridges between the literacies used in and outside of school in "Reconceptualising literacy: Critical multiliteracies for "new times" (2013). Learners' experiences with literacy in various social spaces are also further discussed in "Multiliteracies, E-literature and English Teaching" (2008), where Len Unsworth discusses the role of literature in regard to multiliteracies. Finally, Unsworth's descriptions of electronically "augmented" literary texts are connected to the fantasy book series *Spirit Animals* (2013- ) which offers readers an untraditional supplement to their reading experience.

### **3.6 Government Documents**

In my opinion, the Norwegian national curriculum gives teachers ample opportunity for working with the fantasy genre and transmedia fantasy depictions within the ESL setting, where the genre might serve both as a potential language learning tool as well as a cultural connector. In the following paragraphs, I will argue for the use of the fantasy genre by consulting the content of the Education Act, the English National Curriculum, and the Framework for Basic Skills.

The Education Act of 2008, section 1-1 "The Objectives of Education and training", states that education and training in schools should provide pupils with cultural insight and anchorage, as well as enabling students to develop knowledge and understanding of common international cultural traditions (Norwegian Government A). The general aims of the Education Act presuppose an ESL setting where cultural aspects are essential, while simultaneously allowing language teachers to decide what comprises these cultural aspects and how they can be implemented in the classroom. By introducing ESL students to popular material, such as

contemporary fantasy portrayals within an academic setting, students are allowed to explore the dynamic features of popular culture, as well as working with different types of texts and themes in a contemporary context (Stallings in Dial-Driver, Emmons, & Ford; Gray in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford).

Furthermore, along with the aims of the English subject curriculum, concepts such as fantasy and transmedial storytelling can also enable students to work with and develop many of the basic skills described in the “Framework for Basic Skills” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C). The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training clarifies that the basic skills are integrated in the various competence aims of the English subject curriculum, contributing to students’ development and competence within the subject, while also being part of the overall competence (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 5). In regard to oral skills, it is stated that in order to master oral genres in increasingly complex listening and speaking situations, students must actively participate (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 6). While this is a reasonable request, it is important to note that not all students thrive in linguistically challenging scenarios, and some feel uncomfortable expressing themselves orally. The reasons for students’ reluctance to engage in oral activities can be many, and are challenging to determine, as all students are unique and may encounter different linguistic and emotional barriers during adolescence. Nevertheless, by providing materials that are familiar to the majority of students and prominent within their own culture, the teacher may establish the safe and comfortable communicative setting that is needed within the ESL classroom, and help students to develop and overcome their initial fears and uncertainties.

In addition to oral skills, working with concepts such as transmedia storytelling and multiliteracies will furthermore contribute to the development of some of the basic skills, i.e. the basic skill of reading and digital skills. While the act of reading has traditionally been regarded as a process where one studies and extracts meaning from a written text, the “Framework for Basic Skills” emphasizes that reading means to create meaning from “text in the widest sense” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8). The expanded idea of a text includes everything that can be read throughout different media, and developing knowledge about the characteristics of different types of text and their various functions is a central part of reading as a basic skill (ibid). Hence, the use of transmedia storytelling, which demonstrates how narratives can evolve and alter through different media outlets, may assist students in discovering and learning about the idiosyncrasies of different types of texts, and help them develop as readers.

Furthermore, by employing different media and digital tools in classroom, students can also develop their digital skills. The development of digital skills is defined as “being able to use digital tools, media and resources efficiently and responsibly, to solve practical tasks, find and process information, design digital products and communicate content” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 12). Since the development of digital technology has altered many of the conditions for reading, writing, and oral forms of expression, digital skills have consequently become a prerequisite for active participation in the dynamic society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ibid).

#### **4. Method**

As I briefly mentioned in section 1.3, this dissertation is entirely anchored in theory; it is a literature review which aims to present an objective and methodological summary of the current state of knowledge of my topics of interest, while simultaneously contributing with new insight on these topics by connecting them to my research questions (Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey 74). While a literature review enables me to be flexible as a researcher, and grants me with the opportunity to explore various ideas and concepts, the notion of a literature review is not without methodological criticisms and potential disadvantages (Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey 73). Critics argue that the traditional literature review lacks a formal methodology and therefore seldom provides a methodological audit trail which allows the review to be replicated by others (Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey 75). Furthermore, it has also been noted that the subjective selection grounds may cause potentially biased presentations, and that contrary or conflicting views may not be included in the review (Ibid). However, while all these assumptions illustrate important potential limitations of this research method, I have attempted to attend to one of these criticisms by providing a description of the literary selection process used in this review. Further, in regard to the alleged subjectivity of the selection process, the amount of time provided to me along with the scope of my review made it impossible to carry out a comprehensive review of all current research available, therefore a selection of respectable literature needed to be made.

In order to locate available and appropriate literature, I conducted an extensive search and selection process where multiple texts were researched and evaluated using numerous databases and journals. In the search for articles, I used either specific keywords or a combination of the different keywords, as enumerated in Section 3, in order to limit my search and generate

relevant data. While my central concepts were used as my primary keywords, I additionally made use of some secondary keywords, which were often used in conjunction with the primary. Some of these keywords were: “Young adult literature”, “Media”, “ESL”, “SLA”, “Pop culture”, “teaching”, “Literacy”, “language learning”, and “Education”. By making use of academic search engines such as Oria and various online databases such as Wiley Online Library, EBSCO host, and Google Scholar, I found a number of academic journals which ultimately provided some of the basis for my research. In addition to online articles, various books, both electronic and printed, were also evaluated and used. While I initially began my search for literature with two main concepts, namely fantasy and transmedia storytelling, several of the selected texts and their references eventually led me to new concepts. For instance, my initial interest in fantasy eventually led me to different aspects of narrative theory, and the dynamic nature of transmedia storytelling made me acknowledge the need for multiliteracies and led to further reflection on the potential impact of storytelling on language acquisition.

Ultimately, all my references were selected in accordance with specific criteria and carefully evaluated. In order to locate current and relevant research, the date of publication was considered along with the authors’ backgrounds and fields of expertise. In addition, peer-reviewed articles were considered especially desirable and book reviews were often used to gain quick insight into longer written works. Though much time was assigned to the search for and evaluation of books and articles, it was a necessary process in order to locate current, relevant, and high quality material.

## 5. Literature review

### 5.1. Narrative theory

In this study, I am interested in how we can use narratives, especially fantasy narratives in transmedial forms, for language learning as this allows us to connect the lifeworld of the students with the Norwegian ESL classroom. I begin by exploring Marie-Laure Ryan’s article “Narrative” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005) in order to establish an appropriate definition of the concept, before moving on to review a number of texts which discuss narratives in relation to language acquisition and reading.

### **5.1.1. The Nature of Narratives and Cognitive Aspects of Narratology**

Narrative theory is a multifaceted field of study and the various branches within narratology can be both dynamic and complex. In the encyclopedic entry “Narrative”, Marie-Laure Ryan maintains that the concept of narrative has become acknowledged as a “semiotic phenomenon that transcends disciplines and media” (Ryan A 344). During the last 50 years, the idea of narrative has developed to become an object of inquiry within numerous academic fields, and present day research regarding the nature of narratives has come to make use of two distinct approaches (Ryan A 345). Ryan describes the first of these approaches as a “descriptive approach”, which emphasizes how human beings are influenced by their experiences with narratives, and refers to the second approach as a “definitional approach”, which attempts to capture the distinct features of a narrative (Ryan A 345). In terms of descriptive approaches, numerous scholars have contributed with their academic interpretations of the subject, and together these descriptions combine different beliefs and understandings of a complex concept. For instance, David Herman describes narrative as a “fundamental way of organising human experience and a tool for constructing models of reality” (Herman cited in Ryan A 345), while Jean Marie Schaeffer asserts that “narrative, in its fictional form widens our mental universe beyond the actual and the familiar and provides a playfield for thought experiments” (Schaeffer cited in Ryan A 345). According to Ryan, while descriptive observations, such as the ones presented by Herman and Schaeffer, do not necessarily oppose each other, definitional approaches on the other hand tend to provide conflicting interpretations of the defining features of a narrative (Ryan A 345).

While narrative theory has become an integral part of many fields of academia, the study of the cognitive aspects of narratology has become a vast interdisciplinary area (Emmott 351). In “Narrative Comprehension” Catherine Emmott describes narrative comprehension as a field of study where researchers aim to understand how different readers produce and shape “cognitive representations of narratives” (Emmott 351). Readers’ cognitive representations of narratives, aptly described by Emmott as mental stores of information, account for how readers change their perception from the “here and now”, to the worlds of stories (Ibid). While these cognitive aspects are fundamental parts of experiencing a narrative, Emmott maintains that within disciplines such as literary studies, the mental processes of converting simple text into lush cognitive representations are often taken for granted and awarded little emphasis (Ibid). Furthermore, from a psychological and linguistic point of view, Emmott suggests that there is

still much to be discovered and learned about the way readers move from perceiving strings of written words, to the sensation of being deeply immersed in the story worlds they encounter (ibid).

### **5.1.2. Narrative Transportation across Media**

The concepts and ideas fronted in Emmott's article touch upon an instinctive part of the human mind, which involves our ability to imagine and fantasize. In *Experiencing narrative worlds: On the psychological activities of reading* (1993), psychology professor Richard Gerrig became the first to introduce the idea of "narrative transportation", which is described as a state of departure from the real world, where a narrative serves to transport the experiencer (reader, listener, watcher, etc.) away from the "here and now" (Gerrig 3). According to Gerrig, one of the most extensive aspects of the experience of narrative worlds is the act of transportation, which often occurs when someone is astonished by the depth of an experience (Gerrig 5, 8). When Gerrig refers to experiencers of narrative worlds, he refers mainly to readers, as the majority of his examples are collected from printed media such as novels (7). However, narrative worlds are not restricted to the written medium, and may be experienced through many different media and platforms, as described in detail in the following article.

In "Understanding Media Enjoyment: The Role of Transportation Into Narrative Worlds" (2004) authors Melanie C. Green, Timothy C. Brock, and Geoff F. Kaufman continue developing Gerrig's concept of transportation, and describe the process of becoming fully engaged in a story as "Transportation into a narrative world" (Green & Brock cited in Green, Brock & Kaufman 311-312). The concept of "transportation into a narrative world" has been conceptualized as a distinct mental process that encompasses cognitive, emotional, and imaginary involvement in a narrative, and may be perceived as an integrative blend of attention, imagery and feelings (Green, Brock & Kaufman 311; Green & Block cited in Green, Brock & Kaufman 312). As we explore story worlds through different media, we can easily become immersed in the worlds we are presented with, and while immersion is both dynamic and enigmatic, Green et al. assert that it is an instinctive part of human nature to be drawn into narrative worlds (Green, Brock & Kaufman 316). Psychologists such as Roger C. Schank and Robert Abelson have even argued that stories are the most natural mode of thought for human beings, and Green et al. similarly propose that the ability to become transported into other worlds is a fundamental part of human psychology (Schank & Abelson cited in Green et al. 316; Green et al. 316). The sensation of being "lost in a book" and briefly eluding the confines

of reality is a timeless experience familiar to the majority of readers (Nell, cited in Green et al. 312; Gerrig 3), and Green et al. emphasize that one of the key elements of an enjoyable media experience is that it propels individuals away from their everyday reality and into an enticing story world (311).

While researchers such as Richard Gerrig (1993) and Victor Nell (1988) have emphasized the written medium, Green et al. assert that the key psychological ingredients of the transportation experience are assumed to occur regardless of modality of communication (312). Therefore, the transportation experience is not confined solely to readers or to the written medium in general, as it may also occur with listeners, viewers, or any other recipient of a narrative account (ibid). While the appeal of the transportation experience may be anchored in the allure of alternative worlds and the associated emotional responses and mental imagery, the narrative worlds in question need not be inherently pleasant or innocent (Green, Brock, & Kaufman 314, 315). While some may prefer narrative worlds that adhere to the traditional interpretation of safety and realism, others are drawn towards story worlds that encompass fantasy and horror (Green, Brock, & Kaufman 315). According to Green et al., narrative worlds that primarily contain frightening or melancholic elements allow us to explore our own boundaries of tolerance of the unpleasant emotions these narratives may provoke by vicariously experiencing these feelings often with cathartic consequences (315). Overall, the enjoyment of the transportation experience is not necessarily linked to the specific emotions evoked by the narrative, but rather in the process of temporarily escaping one's reality and emerging as a slightly changed individual (315).

### **5.1.3 Compelling Texts and Language Acquisition**

The transportation theory as it is presented by Gerrig and Green et al. describes the alluring nature of narratives and story worlds, and the authors imply that the act of being “transported” can be a highly desirable state of being. The state of becoming lost in a text and for a brief while experience the thrill of imagination and fantasy, is likewise discussed by Stephen Krashen in “The End of Motivation” (2015), where he argues for the benefits of experiencing motivating input in regard to second language acquisition. In this article, Krashen contradicts some traditionally held beliefs by questioning the validity of some educators’ explicit emphasis on second language learners’ linguistic awareness and enthusiasm, and further challenges the relevance of linguistic motivation as a decisive factor in successful language acquisition (A 34). Accordingly, Krashen hypothesizes that language acquisition is deeply connected to the nature

of the messages we are exposed to, and he argues that acquisition is a natural result of being exposed to compelling and comprehensible input (A 34). In this situation, the primary emphasis is not on development or improvement, but rather on the message (Ibid). Krashen continues this line of argument by hypothesizing that language acquisition is optimally achieved when the nature of the message is so compelling that “the acquirer is not even aware that it is being delivered in another language” (Ibid).

In order to support his hypothesis, Krashen briefly introduces two separate cases, where two young males had demonstrated successful language acquisition predominantly due to the immersive and compelling nature of the messages they were exposed to (A 34-35). In both cases, the boys’ interests did not concern improving their language or developing linguistically, but rather centered on aspects of entertainment and a fascination with the content of the stories / messages they encountered (ibid). Consequently, as opposed to relentlessly reminding language learners of the importance of English, Krashen suggests that teachers and educators utilize the natural process, and aid students towards gaining access to both compelling and immersive input (A 35). The thoughts and ideas proposed by Krashen imply that immersive input is a vital motivational factor that can aid second language learners in developing their linguistic competence. However, is there a recognizable link between Krashen’s idea of compelling comprehensible input and the act of transportation presented by Gerrig and Green et al.? To a certain extent, one can argue that the immersive nature of compelling comprehensible input in the form of fictional narratives can transport a reader into a narrative world, where he/she is exposed to linguistic input as well as an enticing story.

Overall, the abovementioned texts explain only a fraction of the multifaceted nature of narratives, briefly touching upon the cognitive aspects of narrative theory. Can narrative theory and further cognitive reflections influence the ESL classroom and possibly enhance the learning experience of students? I believe the answers lie within the enigmatic nature of students’ cognitive representations (Emmott 351) and within the narrative transportation theory (Gerrig; Green et al.). Although there is still much to be learned in terms of how human beings cognitively interact with narratives, there is no denying that many students become attracted to the allure of various narratives from an early age. While theorists such as Krashen propose that compelling input, such as stories, can aid language students in developing their linguistic knowledge and skills, I likewise propose that the cognitive aspects of narratives and the effects of transportation are vital components in developing a joy of reading as well as maintaining students’ motivation in the ESL classroom.



Students' joy of reading is explicitly mentioned in the main subject area "Written Communication" in the English subject curriculum, where it is stated that students ought to work with a variety of different English texts in order to "stimulate the joy of reading, experience greater understanding, and acquire knowledge" (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training B). By exploring narratives across different media, and experiencing the act of transportation, students can learn from their own cognitive representations and develop both linguistically and emotionally. However, while students ought to experience different types of narratives through numerous types of texts, I would argue that a common denominator that can capture the students' interest can also help develop and maintain students' motivation in the ESL classroom. I believe this denominator is the fantasy genre, which has developed to become one the most discussed and popular literary genres of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **5.2 The Fantasy Genre**

Although digital and technological changes have influenced numerous spheres of youth life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I argue that there are certain aspects that seem to remain unaffected by external influences, and one of these is humanity's primitive interest in fictional narratives and storytelling. Although it is impossible to pinpoint the exact historical origins of tales of fantasy, humans have shared stories since they first acquired the ability to speak (Zipes 2). Throughout history, storytelling has been utilized within societies worldwide as a vital cultural practice, and the use of narratives has enabled humanity to acknowledge their own nature while simultaneously gaining knowledge of the world they inhabit (ibid). While storytelling initially began as a way of sharing knowledge and experiences within a social context (ibid), the concept has developed to become a central cultural feature of both childhood and adolescent life.

My previously mentioned pilot study (Myhrvang 2014) on the potential of the fantasy genre as a language learning tool suggested that fantasy plays a significant role in the everyday life of many young ESL students today. Furthermore, as the National curriculum also urges ESL teachers to connect their teaching plans in the classroom with the students' own culture it seems appropriate to take a closer look at the fantasy genre here. In the upcoming sections, I will review a number of academic texts on the fantasy genre, which have all been organized according to three major concepts. The first section will emphasize the literary value of the fantasy genre, the second section will focus on the development of fantasy in popular culture,

and the third section will shed light on the educational potential of popular fantasy material in the classroom.

### **5.2.1. The History and Nature of the Fantasy Genre**

As readers gradually encounter different literary genres, they will realize that different genres may make different demands in terms of constructing narrative worlds, particularly those which challenge the assumptions of everyday life, such as the worlds of fantasy (Herman cited in Emmott 351). Although works of fiction containing fantastic elements have been part of humanity's literary heritage for countless centuries, the genre in its modern form can trace its roots back to the numerous influences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic Movement (Nikolajeva 60). While Romantic fantasy writers provided the foundation for the development of modern fantasy fiction, later authors such as Edith Nesbit, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien adapted and transformed the mold and contributed to the establishment of a prosperous literary genre (Nikolajeva 61; James 62-63). After a period of steady, though quiet growth, the genre experienced a resurgence in the public eye following the global successes of fantasy works such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008). Rowling and Meyer's popularity not only confirmed that the fantasy genre was alive and well, but also propelled fantasy further into mainstream popular culture. The genre's popularity was likewise augmented by the introduction of film adaptations of various fantasy novels, such as Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) and various directors' adaptations of the *Harry Potter* novels (James 76). Fantasy, in its present state, has become a dynamic transmedia genre, where narratives are presented and altered across different platforms and media (Laetz & Johnston 161).

In her entry "Fantasy" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (2006), Maria Nikolajeva sheds light on an important issue regarding the fantasy genre, namely whether fantasy is to be considered escapist literature, which can be considered as literature that takes readers away from the worries of everyday life into a realm of dreams and imagination (62). Though some might consider contemporary depictions of fantasy as mere entertainment without much literary substance, Nikolajeva maintains that prominent and well-crafted examples of fantasy use the fantastic form as a narrative device, effectively applying it as a metaphor for reality (Ibid). Furthermore, fantasy enables writers and readers alike to attend to important psychological and existential questions in a somewhat detached manner, which can prove more effective with younger readers than direct realism (Nikolajeva 62). Nikolajeva's description of

the immersive nature of fantasy portrayals mirrors the responses and opinions of several of the participants in the focus group interview conducted in the pilot study “The Potential of the Fantasy Genre in the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Upper Secondary ESL Classroom in Norway: What do the Pupils Think?” (Myhrvang).

However, despite the fact that works of fantasy have been an important aspect of the literary heritage of both adult and children’s literature for decades, its status has developed differently. While the genre is highly esteemed within the world of children’s literature, it is generally considered a “low genre” within mainstream literature, and consequently granted little respect within serious scholarship (Nikolajeva 58). Nevertheless, young readers do not necessarily select their reading material based on critics’ interpretations of what constitutes literary merit, nor are they necessarily swayed by classical literature; however, their opinions and attitudes will always to some degree be shaped and altered by the culture that surrounds them.

### **5.2.2. Fantasy in Scandinavian Popular Culture**

In “Recognising the Fantasy Literature Genre” (2006), Finnish culture researcher Irma Hirsjärvi argues that the popularity of the genre is strongly related to Anglo-American popular culture, the success of fantasy portrayals in cinema, as well as the rapidly growing interest in Japanese manga and anime (Hirsjärvi no pages). The effects of globalization and the influence of Anglo-American popular culture have contributed in shaping different aspects of youth culture, and as a result, the fantasy genre has prospered and become highly popular. In regard to the prosperity of the genre and the increase of fantasy based fan activities both online and offline, Hirsjärvi theorizes that fantasy may be interpreted as a response to the veiled needs of young readers which reflect the changes in society and the “individually experienced but collectively shared processes” of experiencing fantasy (Hirsjärvi no pages). While Hirsjärvi’s research is predominantly concerned with the fantasy genre in a Finnish setting, her descriptions of the development of fantasy in Finland seem to mirror what has happened in Norway.

Hirsjärvi’s proposed connection between fantasy and Anglo-American popular culture, along with her emphasis on the rapid success of cinematic portrayals of fantasy worldwide, provide a reasonable explanation for the growing popularity of fantasy in the Scandinavian society. The genre’s diverse nature, which consists of multiple sub genres and a large variety of texts across different media, has led many to adopt it as their genre of choice and it has consequently developed a large fan following. Although the genre’s transmedia success has been vital, I believe the genre’s ability to present fundamental questions and themes in a “detached manner”

(Nikolajeva 62), is one of its strongest virtues. The data that was collected and discussed in my pilot study (Myhrvang), supported this premise, and provided an indication that the genre had become a regular part of the youth culture of the participants.

### **5.2.3 Popular Fantasy Material in the Classroom**

In *Fantasy Media in the Classroom: Essays on Teaching with Film, Television, Literature, Graphic Novels and Video Games* (2012), edited by Emily Dial-Driver, Sally Emmons, and James Ford, a number of authors contribute with essays where they discuss the potential didactic advantages of working with popular fantasy material in the English classroom. While the book is primarily concerned with native English-speaking students in advanced academic settings, such as American colleges and universities, I believe that due to the impact of Anglo-American popular culture, many of the ideas proposed in the book also ought to be examined in terms of their validity and value in an ESL setting. Through the various essays in the book, different authors focus on how popular fantasy works can enhance teaching and learning, and illustrate how teachers and educators can employ these works in the classroom – what Jim Ford refers to as the pedagogy of popular culture (Ford in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 3).

While the academic and didactic potential of popular material, and the extent to which it should be used in the English classroom, have been debated among both first-language and second-language teachers for some time, Ford argues for the relevance and value of using popular material (Ford in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 3). Ford elaborates that a common misconception associated with the use of popular material is that teachers that devote time to popular culture in the classroom have abandoned the teaching of classic literature (3). However, though different in nature, using one type of material does not necessarily exclude the use of another. According to Ford, employing aspects of popular culture in the classroom is not an attempt at replacing the established curriculum, but rather aims to expand and enrich the curriculum (3). As the English curriculum of the Norwegian school is not restricted to specific literary titles, teachers are at liberty to include a combination of classical literature and popular material if they wish.

But how can this be accomplished within the confines of the classroom? In *Fantasy Media in the Classroom: Essays on Teaching with Film, Television, Literature, Graphic Novels and Video Games* (2012), several of the authors maintain the belief that popular fantasy material can be incorporated in many ways and for different purposes. While contributors such as Jesse Stallings and Laura Gray illustrate how fantasy material can enhance student learning

concerning traditional concepts, other contributors such as Sally Emmons and Jim Ford further argue for the significance of the fantasy genre in general and emphasize the value of studying different works of fantasy across media (Ford in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 4). Both of the abovementioned strategies could certainly be implemented in the ESL classroom; however, which strategy one should select at which time would depend on the course and class in question as well as the nature of the texts, themes, and topics that were to be introduced.

In the chapter “Pop Pedagogy”, Stallings elaborates on the idiosyncrasies of both contemporary and traditional material in the English classroom, and argues that due to the vast scope of available didactic material related to classic literature, many teachers may consider it easier to incorporate classical material than contemporary material in the classroom (Stallings in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 11). However, Stallings maintains that a mechanical or exaggerated use of the same classic literary titles year after year, may signal to students that “the answers” connected to the titles have already been found, which will further lead them to look for interpretations and “answers” online rather than applying their own analytical skills and knowledge (Ibid). In accordance with this dilemma, Stallings argues for the importance of a classroom setting where literary analysis is an integral part of learning, and where students can learn how to apply these analytical skills to the world outside of the classroom and to the literary works that they themselves deem valuable (Stallings in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 12). With guidance from their teacher, this environment would aid students in developing their analytical and critical skills, and encourage them to make analytical connections between the works encountered in class and the works encountered in their spare time (Ibid). Stallings further clarifies that the aim of using contemporary works alongside the classics is to demonstrate how the skills developed in the classroom can be applied to all aspects of students’ lives, and by introducing said skills through different media, students can “maintain and expand a repository of useful skills applicable to all forms of communication and consumption” (Ibid).

Overall, Stallings suggests that popular works, regardless of medium, should not be neglected or dismissed due to a lack of established literary merit. Instead, he advises teachers and students alike to work together, in order to potentially discover and establish that merit (Stallings in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 13). Popular works, though at times chastised and negatively branded, should not be labeled inferior or bad, but be embraced and integrated by teachers in order to solidify the connection between literary analyses and the students’ private lives (Ibid). In agreement with the ideas proposed by Stallings, Laura Grey likewise emphasizes the potential of the fantasy genre, and maintains that popular works of fantasy can effectively be

applied to the teaching of traditional texts where they can enable students to better comprehend the material (Gray in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 24). According to Gray, fantasy portrayals across media provide contemporary students with a unique “lens of understanding”, which can help aid the intellectual and cultural struggles that many students encounter during their education (Ibid). In order to illustrate her theories, Gray discusses how popular material can be implemented alongside already established literary works within the classroom, and demonstrates how this material can extend and exemplify traditional literary themes and motifs and advance the learning experience (Gray in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 25).

Although the theories and ideas presented by Ford, Stallings and Gray are primarily intended for native speakers, I do not believe they are restricted to this use, but could also serve as a beneficial platform for introducing popular fantasy to second language learners. By emphasizing the growing cultural presence of fantasy within Scandinavian popular culture, earlier research such as Hirsjärvi (2006) and Myhrvang (2014), has demonstrated that the popularity of the fantasy genre is not confined to Anglo-American regions. Hence, aspects of the concept “pop pedagogy”, previously presented by Stallings, might be applicable to the ESL context. Stallings’ arguments for the significance of literary analysis and the development of critical skills mirror parts of the philosophy presented in the “Framework for Basic Skills”, which emphasize analysis and interpretation in regard to both oral and written skills (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8-11). Furthermore, Stallings’ idea of encouraging and aiding students’ analytical endeavors outside of the classroom (12) corresponds well with the Norwegian core curriculum’s idea of school as an institution that must negotiate “the difficult balance between stimulating and exploiting the culture the young themselves create, and forming a counterweight to it” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training A 31).

Consequently, I argue that elements of Stallings’ proposed “pop pedagogy” could be incorporated in ESL teaching in order to both solidify the connection between literary analyses and students’ recreational experiences (Stallings in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 13), as well as fulfilling the aims set out in the curriculum. While using popular fantasy material in the classroom can possibly help students to develop their analytical skills, I additionally believe that the genre can serve as motivational factor for many students. By providing students with an opportunity to work with, experience, and interpret works of a culturally familiar literary genre, many can develop and/ or maintain their fascination with fantasy, and potentially provide this at times neglected genre with their own sense of literary merit. Whether popular fantasy material is to be used to supplement traditional literature, as suggested by Grey, or if it is to be

studied unaccompanied, as suggested by Dial-Driver, I believe it can greatly benefit the ESL classroom.

### **5.3 Transmedia storytelling**

In “What is Fantasy?” (2008), Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston emphasize fantasy as a transmedia genre, which consists of a large variety of media portrayals and additional forms of entertainment (Laetz & Johnston 161). In regard to this portrayal of a literary genre influenced by present-day technological changes, I would like to refer back to my earlier description of the current student population in Norway. In the introduction to this thesis, I characterized current students as members of a “Square-eyed generation”, greatly influenced by the many cultural and technological changes of the 21st century. Due to their early experiences with concepts such as multiple media outlets and the World Wide Web, I believe students are likely to pursue narratives in transmedial formats, and explore beyond the boundaries of traditional printed texts. In the “Framework for Basic Skills” in the national curriculum it is stated that experiences with multiple types of texts is an important aspect of reading as a basic skill, and it is further emphasized that students are to work with the expanded idea of a text (The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8). Furthermore, working with various types of narrative texts across media can enable students to develop different aspects of their basic skills, and develop both linguistically as students and emotionally as individuals. Ultimately, I suggest that transmedia stories can be a key asset in aiding students in developing the multiple literacies that are a central focus in the national curriculum.

In the following sections, I will review a number of texts connected to transmedia storytelling, and discuss some of the ideas presented. The first articles, written by Daryoosh Hayati (2012) and Henry Jenkins (2010), are devoted to the nature of transmedia storytelling. The following texts that are discussed, written by Elise Seip Tønnessen (2014) and Margaret Mackey (2010) focus on adaptation as a concept with an emphasis on film. The third section includes texts by Espen Aarseth (2010), Marie-Laure Ryan (2010), and Harry J. Brown (2008), which all discuss narrativity and storytelling in video games, before the fourth section presents the ideas of Linda Hutcheon (2008), particularly her descriptions of the narrational modes of and different ways of engaging with transmedial narratives.

#### **5.3.1 The Nature of Transmedia Storytelling**

While storytelling has been a source of entertainment and learning since the initial development of language, the nature of storytelling is continually affected by the cultural changes in society and the wide range of entertainments that come with the development of digital media and cyberspace (Hayati 196). In “Transmedia Storytelling: A Study of the Necessity, Features and Advantages” (2012), Daryoosh Hayati discusses various aspects of storytelling across media, and argues that as new technologies continue to alter the conventional storytelling tradition, the establishment of transmedia depictions enables audiences to develop deeper and more varied connections to the material they are presented with (Hayati 196). As different media have different characteristics and offer different ways of immersion, the various media platforms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century ought to be acknowledged as representing the diversity of modern storytelling.

Although transmedia storytelling as a concept has been mentioned within various academic disciplines over the years, the subject has also been discussed at length by media scholars such as Henry Jenkins. In “Transmedia Storytelling and Entertainment: An annotated syllabus” (2010), Jenkins defines transmedia storytelling as a process where “integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins A 944). Jenkins’s definition gracefully captures part of the essence of 21<sup>st</sup> century media culture, and he further elaborates that in an ideal setting, each medium will make its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (Jenkins A 944). For instance, although J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937) began as a novel, the story of Bilbo Baggins has also been portrayed in illustrated novels, cartoons, video games, and film adaptations. As Tolkien’s story is depicted across multiple delivery channels, each portrayal contributes with unique elements, altering the original narrative and influencing the unfolding of the story. This intertextual plurality is further discussed at length by Margaret Mackey in her entry “Media Adaptations” in *The Routledge Companion to Children’s Literature* (2010), where she argues that a multiply told story, such as *The Hobbit*, may be envisioned as “suspended in an intertextual web of incarnations” (Mackey 113), where the textual plurality influences all versions (ibid).

The ideas and thoughts presented by Hayati, Jenkins, and Mackey provide a detailed portrayal of the media landscape that many students encounter on a regular basis, and additionally illustrate that the extended idea of text described in the national curriculum is an integral part of the popular culture surrounding students. Furthermore, Hayati’s idea, which suggests that transmedia depictions enable audiences to develop deeper and more diverse connections to the material (Hayati 196), promotes transmedia storytelling as a viable didactic tool. By providing



students with an opportunity to explore a story as it changes and adapts between different modes of media, while simultaneously contributing with authentic language material, transmedia storytelling can help ESL students to develop both their linguistic skills as well as their connections to the material.

### **5.3.2 Transmedia storytelling and the merits of film adaptation**

The effects of globalization, such as the increasing presence of Anglo American popular culture in Scandinavian society (Hirsjärvi), has profoundly influenced youth cultures all across Norway, and provided students with opportunities to explore different stories across various media. Young readers' pursuit of stories across a diverse media landscape is discussed in depth by Elise Seip Tønnessen in *Jakten på Fortellinger* (2014), where she recounts an experience where a young girl of her acquaintance developed an interest in J. R. R. Tolkien's book series *The Lord of the Rings* after first being introduced to the film adaptations by director Peter Jackson (2001-2003) (13). In regard to this transmedial event, Tønnessen argues that film adaptations of literary works, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *The Hobbit* and *The Twilight Saga*, have contributed to a new form of global mass proliferation of books, where the interest in the novels is reinforced by other media (Tønnessen 13).

While film adaptations ought to be acknowledged by educators for their influence in the proliferation of literary works (Tønnessen 13), and further commended for their positive attributes as works of art, Mackey argues that film adaptations are often associated with negative attitudes, and at times depicted as inferior renditions of original written works (Mackey 112). According to Mackey, this conventional attitude derives from a default set of priorities that is upheld by some educators, which privileges the printed format above that of visual representations (Mackey 112). Linda Hutcheon elaborates that these conservative ideals become particularly noticeable within discourse surrounding film adaptations, where it has become common to emphasize negative aspects such as loss, not only in terms of quantity, but also quality, and where performance media are depicted as incapable of linguistic and narrative subtlety (Hutcheon, cited in Mackey 112). Although visual representations of literary works will always be limited by different restrictive elements, such as time frames, it is important to note that while a film may not be able to capture every element described in the original printed text this does not render the adaptation inferior or substandard as a work of art. As Mackey emphasizes in her article: different media simply offer different pleasures, and regardless of

constraints and limitations, it is the advantages and benefits of each medium that need to be considered and valued (Mackey 112).

While the merits of film adaptations have occasionally been neglected within areas such as educational research and academia, scholars such as Brian McFarlane have attempted to expand the doctrines of media criticism by arguing for the validity of the adaptation in itself (McFarlane, cited in Mackey 113). In *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996), McFarlane distinguishes between elements of “narrative”, which are transferrable between mediums, and elements of “enunciation”, which are specific to a particular medium (McFarlane, cited in Mackey 113). As each term attends to opposite aspects of adaptation, McFarlane argues that the use of terms such as “narrative” and “enunciation”, allows for a more nuanced criticism of adaptations, where interpretations can exceed concerns that solely emphasize whether an adapted version is sufficiently faithful to the original work or not (McFarlane, cited in Mackey 113).

The ideas and scenarios discussed by scholars such as Tønnessen, Mackey, Hutcheon and McFarlane, illustrate that the various media outlets for transmedia storytelling have not always been deemed equal by all scholars, and demonstrate that adaptation as a concept has been subjected to both praise and criticism. However, ESL students’ inevitable encounters with different types of texts outside of school, combined with the national curriculum’s emphasis on working with a large variety of texts in school (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D), make it necessary to equate the value of printed and visual representations in the ESL classroom. While each medium contributes with different advantages and benefits for a diverse population of different learners, it is also vital that students learn to recognize and understand these aspects in order to meet the aims of the curriculum.

### **5.3.3 Videogames and storytelling**

While the educational merits of film adaptations and film in general have been debated during the last decades, the film’s function as an immersive storytelling platform has generally been accepted within academia. However, the narrative function of another media platform has caused much scholarly debate, namely video games. In the following sections, I will present the ideas of various scholars, and briefly mention how some prominent academics perceive what some have come to view as the “outer limit” of narrative theory (Henry Jenkins B 80).

One of the most prominent researchers within video game studies, and a consistent contributor to the discussion of video games and narrativity, is Professor Espen Aarseth. In his entry “Multi-path Narrative” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2010), Aarseth argues that the narrative dimension of some videogames may be interpreted as multi-path narratives, where the user can select one of numerous branches in order to reach a specific goal and/or ending (Aarseth 323). However, Aarseth likewise emphasizes an important dilemma within video games, namely whether works of “Multi-path Narrative” are to be labeled as narratives, or merely as games or experiments that employ narrative fragments, devices, and other mechanisms for various purposes (Aarseth 324). Aarseth’s arguments and ideas concerning the narrative dimension of video games question the very notion of what constitutes a narrative, and present the intricate, and at times hard to define, relationship between game and story.

In her entry “Narratives, Games, and Play”, Marie-Laure Ryan elaborates on this relationship, and discusses the narrative dimensions of various types of games and acts of play (Ryan B 355). According to Ryan, videogames are exceptional among games due to their ability to integrate problem-solving activities in a rich and varied fictional world, which can stimulate both the strategic thinking skills and imagination of the players involved (Ryan B 355). While videogames are tremendously varied in terms of both gameplay and sense of story, Ryan exemplifies “quest-type games”, which are often located within the genre of Role-playing video games, where players can take control of an avatar and take part in an adventure partly scripted by code, and partly formed by their own decisions and actions (Ryan B 355).

While critics such as Aarseth have questioned the very notion of narrativity in video games, and critics such as Ryan have elaborated on the possible narrative dimensions in video games, other prominent academics have discussed and contemplated the academic potential of the medium. Serving as an outspoken advocate of video games, Marc Prensky has for many years displayed his appreciation of the medium, and promoted the potential of video games as pedagogical tools (Brown, introduction X). Prensky hypothesizes that the educational effectiveness of videogames is due to their natural structure, which often consists of goal-oriented tasks and rewards, and education researcher James Paul Gee further argues that games help us develop our cognitive skills, and ultimately have the ability to accelerate our cognitive development (Prensky cited in Brown, introduction X; Gee cited in Brown, introduction X – XI).

However, while the ideas and theories fronted by researchers such as Prensky and Gee primarily emphasize the cognitive aspects of gameplay, video games have also developed to become a debated subject in terms of their functions as storytelling platforms. In *Video Games and Education* (2008), Harry J. Brown attempts to incorporate the concept of videogames into mainstream critical discourse, and provide a wider understanding of videogames, game literacy, and narrativity (XIV). In regard to the potential narrative dimensions of videogames, Brown outlines aspects of the debate between ludologists and narratologists, and elaborates on their ongoing discussion regarding the nature of videogames. While being primarily devoted to the gameplay experience, ludologists uphold the idea that video games should be studied as games, and elaborate that playing a video game differs cognitively from other distinctly narratively driven processes such as reading a novel or watching a film (Brown 4). Whereas ludologists support the idea that the gameplay experience in a video game relies on mastery of various puzzles and problems, narratologists in contrast emphasize that video games can maintain an identifiable narrative structure with recognizable plots and characters (Brown 4). Although the interactivity of video games undeniably complicates traditional concepts of plot and character, narratologists maintain that adventure games invite the player to identify with characters and ultimately experience an Aristotelian emotional catharsis (Brown 4).

Although the articles presented in this review represent only a small fraction of the academic discussions concerning the narrative dimensions of video games, Aarseth, Ryan, and Brown nevertheless emphasize some significant aspects worthy of consideration. Whether the multifaceted nature of video games merely brushes the outer limits of narrative theory, or functions as a separate phenomenon that solely employs narrative fragments (Aarseth 324) is a matter of debate; however, the act of playing video games has become part of the daily agenda for numerous students worldwide. While the structures and storylines of video games differ tremendously depending on elements such as genre and intended age group, I argue that many students seek out games such as fantasy adventure games and fantasy role-playing games (Ryan 355) in an attempt to discover enticing storylines combined with exciting gameplay. These stories, though untraditional and interactive, nevertheless offer rich, authentic linguistic input for players, which raise the question of whether video games might be utilized in the classroom in order to promote both storytelling and language learning. However, questions and speculations such as these are not easily answered, and only time will tell if the linguistic dimensions of video games can be a valuable resource for language learning, and whether video games can ever be successfully integrated in the ESL classroom. Regardless of the future of

video games in didactic settings, they have become a common practice within students' private lives, and in terms of recreational language acquisition, they are also part of students' informal language learning environment. Ultimately, video games can no longer merely be deemed as simple, trivial entertainment without much substance, as they have evolved to become one of the integral parts of transmedia storytelling.

#### **5.3.4 Modes of engagement**

The idiosyncrasies and advantages of the various media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are discussed at length by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), where she proposes a dual definition of adaptation as a concept, and argues that adaptation may be viewed as a product as well as a process (Hutcheon 22). According to Hutcheon, emphasizing adaptation as a process enables us to consider the relations between the major modes of engagement, i.e. how adaptations allow us to tell, show and interact with different stories (Hutcheon 22). We engage in stories in various ways, through various media, and while each outlet may be interpreted as immersive in its own right, Hutcheon argues that the degree and method of immersion will always differ between the modes (Hutcheon 22). The different modes of engagement are presented as the “telling mode”, the “performance mode”, and the “participatory mode” (Hutcheon 23-27), and in the following sections I will present each of these proposed modes briefly and introduce ideas inspired by both Hutcheon and Mackey.

The first of the modes of engagement is described by Hutcheon as the “Telling mode”, which usually comprises narrative literature (e.g. novels), which can immerse readers and listeners through imagination and cognitive creativity (Hutcheon 22-23). Our ability to create mental images from textual and aural descriptions enables a written narrative to come to life, and develop personal features and characteristics. For example, while all readers may interpret the word “flower” as a plant, the mental image of the appearance of that plant will vary from person to person depending on their past experiences and memories. Whereas some might envision a traditional red rose, others might see a fantasy flower shaped by various mental images known only to the reader. In regard to these cognitive aspects, Mackey elaborates on Hutcheon's description of the “telling mode”, and points out that while readers vivify and enliven a written story with their own imaginations, these cognitive and emotional efforts result in the creation of worlds personally shaped by the readers (Mackey 115). In view of the idiosyncrasies and benefits of the “telling mode”, Hutcheon maintains that while our imagination enables us to

envision unconstrained by limitations of the visual and aural, it is likewise controlled and led by the selected, directing words of the story (Hutcheon 23).

While the “telling mode” immerses primarily through cognitive aspects, Hutcheon’s second mode, named the “Showing/Performance mode” (e.g. a film or a play), predominantly immerses recipients through aural and visual elements (Hutcheon 22). By enabling recipients to perceive and experience visual and gestural performances directly, the performance mode concretizes elements such as characters and locations, and provides a detailed visual rendering of a story (Hutcheon 23). Hutcheon also emphasizes that visual aspects are frequently accompanied by musical scores, which can act as aural “equivalents” to the emotions of characters and further enhance the visual and verbal aspects of the story (Hutcheon 23). However, although the merits of the performance mode are many, Hutcheon nevertheless maintains that the mode cannot wholly approximate the complex interlinking of description, narration, and explanation, found in the telling mode (ibid). Furthermore, when a narrative moves between modes, for instance from the telling mode to the performance mode, specific choices are made in order to concretize different elements of the story; however, these choices do not necessarily coincide with other interpretations of the story. As Mackey illustrates, the appearance and demeanor of a specific actor portraying a character may not necessarily match a reader’s imagined embodiment of that character (Mackey 117). For example, the way in which Peter Jackson depicted the various dynamic characters in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) may not necessarily correspond with how others envisioned the characters while reading J. R. R. Tolkien’s novels.

The last of Hutcheon’s modes is the “Participatory mode” (e.g. videogames), which differs significantly from both the telling dimension and the performance dimension, as interactivity provides a more direct type of immersion (Hutcheon 22, 25). Hutcheon explains that in sharp contrast to the language-generated worlds of novels, video games present players with dynamic, interactive worlds in which they can physically enter and consequently become active characters in a narrative world (Hutcheon 25, 27). However, the majority of narratively driven video games are not in any way deprived of language, and many offer players opportunities to experience linguistic input through both visual and aural text while playing.

While the narrative dimensions of videogames have been widely debated for many years within academic circles, there are divided opinions regarding how interactivity may affect the natural progression of a traditional narrative (Brown 4). Furthermore, in regard to the psychological

nature of video games, Mackey notes that video games have often been accused of “failing to express emotional states successfully” (120). While Mackey’s assertion has been a recurring criticism of video games, I feel it would be generalization to assume that all video games, regardless of genre, lack these emotional aspects. While traditionally not concerned with emotional elements to the same extent as novels or films, there are nevertheless games that predominantly emphasize emotions, and make use of a combination of text, images and interactivity in order to augment these aspects. Free Bird Games’ title *To the Moon* (2011), for example, relies little on advanced game mechanics, but rather emphasizes an untraditional, emotionally driven story arc. In his review of the game, Gamespot’s Kevin VanOrd praised the game’s narrative dimensions, and emphasized the use of intriguing dialog combined with a beautiful soundtrack (VanOrd). While my selection of this title is to some degree affected by my own subjectivity, *To the Moon* has been widely praised among critics, and also received numerous prestigious nominations within the video game community worldwide.

Ultimately, while each mode of engagement represents different benefits and ways of immersion, the different media platforms embody the possibilities of transmedia storytelling in the 21st century. The different modes of engagement and the different media should not be compared and analyzed in order to locate a “superior” mode or media, but rather be acknowledged and appreciated as representatives of the diversity of modern storytelling. The diversity of transmedia storytelling enables language students to explore English stories and the English language through various platforms in popular culture, and the characteristics of the different media appeal to an increasingly diverse, dynamic student population. The inclusion of transmedia storytelling in the ESL classroom can aid students in developing several of the basic skills described in the national curriculum, where it is emphasized that students shall read multiple types of texts and experience “texts” in the widest sense of the word (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8). Additionally, the different modes of engagement represent aspects that students experience outside of the classroom, and by incorporating these modes and letting students experience the idiosyncrasies of each, it can help to bridge the narrative and linguistic experiences students encounter outside of school with the teaching of English.

#### **5.4 Language acquisition**

While transmedia storytelling and the different modes of engagement illustrate the many ways one can encounter and experiences different narratives, these concepts also provide readers,

watchers, and players with exposure to rich, authentic linguistic material. Through recreational linguistic exposure, learners can both read and hear different material which can aid in the development of their linguistic awareness, their phonetic alertness, as well as their vocabulary development. In the following sections, I will review a number of texts regarding language acquisition, and discuss some of the ideas presented. The first section is devoted to different aspects of linguistic input as well as formal and informal language learning. The second section deals with “everyday language” and “school language”, while the third section emphasizes students’ reading habits and the nature of texts. Finally, the fourth section discusses the nature and educational potential of narrow reading.

#### **5.4.1. The significance of linguistic input and formal and informal language learning**

As students take part in the daily activities of adolescent lives, they gather social, cultural, and linguistic experiences, which shape and alter their personal development; and while all students are affected differently by these external influences, their shared experiences contribute to produce a dynamic youth culture. Within this youth culture, the English language has come to thrive as the effects of globalization continue to influence and shape Norwegian popular culture. In *Engelsk språkdidaktikk* (2009), Bo Lundahl elaborates on this subject, and asserts that the English language’s central position within Scandinavian society has positively influenced young people’s perception of English, and that recreational exposure to English outside of school has become an important part of students’ linguistic influences (37). However, while recreational linguistic exposure may serve as a positive asset in many students’ linguistic development, a direct connection between recreational exposure and language learning might be difficult to verify. As all language learners acquire knowledge differently, and encounter different types of linguistic material within different settings, it would be unreasonable to assume that there is a universal answer applicable to all students. Drawing on the ambiguous findings of the 2004 report “Engelska i Åtta Europeiska Länder” (Skolverket cited in Lundahl 37), Lundahl argues that the amount of English students encounter within recreational settings is not a crucial factor in itself, but elaborates that the language learning process depends more on the active attitudes of students, along with their experiences with different types of English within both academic and non-academic contexts (37).

Lundahl’s remarks regarding the impact and significance of linguistic exposure, contributes to a longstanding and extensive discussion regarding the nature and role of linguistic input in second language acquisition. In “Second Language Acquisition in Informal Setting” (2014),



Taher Bahrani, Tam Shu Sim, and Marziyeh Nekoueizadeh review some of the earlier research conducted within the area of second language acquisition (henceforth SLA), and consider the role of language input in regard to SLA development in informal settings (Bahrani, Sim, & Nekoueizadeh 1714). By reviewing and interpreting studies conducted by various researchers over the course of three decades, Bahrani, Sim, and Nekoueizadeh illustrate that the role and significance of external factors such as language input have been debated within different language learning theories for some time (Bahrani et al. 1714). While some theories have deemed linguistic input insignificant, others have argued that it is a substantial, contributing factor (Bahrani et al. 1714); however, regardless of theoretical disagreements, Rod Ellis upholds that there is a general consensus among present SLA theories regarding the need for language input in general (Ellis cited in Bahrani et al. 1714).

While it has been established that some type of linguistic input is necessary for SLA (Bahrani et al. 1717), this input will always vary in terms of aspects such as form and setting. Lundahl maintains that students' experiences with the English language will always be divided between different settings, some of them academic, structured by rules and aims, and others non-academic, stripped of restrictions or specific objectives (Lundahl 38). As language input may be encountered within both formal and informal language settings, it becomes necessary to note the distinction between formal and informal language learning. According to Lundahl, learning is never restricted to specific areas or settings, but rather occurs continuously in various forms (Lundahl 38). Therefore, all areas of life provide students with opportunities to learn and develop as individuals, and while both formal and informal learning provide beneficial settings for learning, they are noticeably different, in terms of both structure and setting.

Alan Rogers describes formal learning as a structured, purposeful, and predominantly school-based process; in sharp contrast to the often incidental, unstructured, and unpurposeful nature of informal language learning (Rogers cited Bahrani et al. 1717). Lundahl elaborates on the description provided by Rogers, and states that in contrast to formal learning, informal learning is not restricted or governed by any distinct organizational or temporal frames, and often occurs in an incidental, implicit manner (Lundahl 38). While functioning as two opposite poles in terms of learning, both formal and informal language-learning situations are common and important factors in Norwegian ESL students' linguistic development. In the ESL classroom, students are taught the target language in a structured, formal setting, and while outside of school, students often encounter the target language in various informal settings (Lightbown & Spada cited in Bahrani et al. 1717). Ultimately, although commonly referred to as opposites,

formal and informal language learning are not necessarily restricted to specific settings, and may occasionally coincide and overlap (Bahrani et al. 1717).

Ultimately, while the enduring influences of globalization continue to alter cultural aspects of Norwegian society, the increasing relevance of English within students' youth culture will continue to influence ESL students' experiences with linguistic exposure and input. However, due to ESL students' inevitable varying experiences with recreational exposure, it is vital that the classroom addresses, and attempts to positively influence students' attitudes regarding the value of recreational English use (Lundahl 37). Furthermore, as illustrated by Ellis, language input is an integral part of developing an understanding of a second language, whether the situation is of a formal or informal nature (Ellis cited in Bahrani et al. 1714). Since formal and informal language learning display both benefits and challenges for learners, how can we as teachers potentially harvest some of the positive aspects of each, and incorporate them in an ESL setting? I argue that it could prove troublesome to attempt to emulate all aspects of informal language learning in the classroom, as the nature and structure of the classroom differ immensely from that of many recreational settings. However, by incorporating elements that students usually encounter during their time away from the classroom, it could potentially create a "hybrid experience", bridging some of the students' recreational experiences with the formal setting of the ESL classroom. Consequently, through such "hybrid experiences", students will also encounter different varieties of English, and develop an understanding of the differences, as well as the similarities between everyday language and school language.

#### **5.4.2 Everyday Language and School Language**

Due to the fact that ESL students' linguistic progression is influenced by both formal and informal language learning settings, students must ultimately adapt to the various influences of both academic and colloquial varieties of English. Lundahl asserts that the school setting generally involves the use of complex, formal, and academic English, as opposed to the English encountered in everyday life, which is often of a more colloquial and oral nature (Lundahl 44). As students progress through their years at school, the cognitive demands required of them systematically increase and become more complex (Ibid), and when students enroll at upper secondary school, the English subject curriculum emphasizes the development of academic language and complex linguistic understanding (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D). However, this does not omit the significance of oral, everyday language, as the

curriculum also emphasizes the need for English for communicative purposes with both native and non-native speakers (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D).

Although it is difficult to determine exactly how an ESL course is to achieve optimal didactic efficiency, as there are so many variables in play, some factors nevertheless need to be considered in order to provide students with a relevant and stimulating learning setting. In accordance with their own didactic understanding and the aims of the curriculum, teachers are at liberty to decide upon matters such as content, tasks, and work methods applied in the classroom (Lundahl 46). However, the subject material introduced in class should also be relevant to students' lives. Therefore, teachers also need to be acquainted with the knowledge that students establish outside of the classroom, and understand how this relates to the forms of knowledge situated at school (Ibid).

### **5.4.3 Student Reading Habits and the Nature of Texts**

In terms of functioning as a potential bridge between students' recreational usage of English and the ESL classroom, the incorporation of informal language input in the classroom can be implemented through various activities, such as exploring different narratives through audiovisual media. In their review of earlier ideas discussed by researchers such as Patsy Lightbown, Nina Spada, Lyn Pemberton, Sanaz Fallahkhair, and Judith Masthoff, Bahrani et al. illustrate some of the various sources of input available for learners within informal ESL contexts (Bahrani et al. 1718). While learning in informal settings might be achieved through interaction and contact with other interlocutors communicating in the target language (ibid), Lightbown and Spada also maintain that activities such as watching movies that provide appropriate language input are additional examples of informal language learning (Lightbown & Spada cited in Bahrani et al. 1718).

Pemberton, Fallahkhair and Masthoff further elaborate on this premise, and describe that when watching a film, language learners indirectly become involved in the language learning process when they attempt to make sense of what they are experiencing by incorporating different language learning strategies (Pemberton, Fallahkhair, & Masthoff cited in Bahrani et al. 1718). Although the ideas introduced by Lightbown and Spada and Pemberton et al. are primarily concerned with informal settings outside of school, I argue that the inclusion of audiovisual narratives in the classroom can nevertheless help to create a bridge between the students' various experiences with the English language. By allowing students to work with what many deem as "recreational interests" in an academic setting, students can learn that their own

experiences and interests are worthy of acknowledgment, and further help them to develop and maintain a positive attitude towards the English subject.

While Bahrani et al. emphasize the merits and challenges of utilizing audiovisual technologies as sources of authentic language input (1719-1721); their discussions also raise the question of whether learners' experiences with audiovisual technologies and multiple types of texts have influenced their reading habits and interests. In 2012, The Norwegian statistics bureau Statistics Norway published their yearly report on the cultural habits of Norwegian citizens, which indicated that the reading habits of Norwegian youth had become divided. While the report documented a positive trend in youths' practices of borrowing books, audio books, and movies, it likewise indicated that while younger children maintained a stable interest in reading, teenagers appeared to have become more divided on the matter (Jensen cited in Tønnessen 20-21). Though some teenagers maintain, and further develop, their childhood fascination with reading books, the data also indicate that others eventually discard the reading of literature in exchange for other interests (Ibid). There are many reasons for this partial decline in interest among teenagers but they are impossible to determine with any kind of certainty. Nevertheless, the national curriculum emphasizes that literary texts can aid in instilling a lifelong joy of reading among students, and by working with the extended idea of a text, students can explore different cultural forms of expression and discover the merits and challenges they present (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D; Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8). Hence, I argue that audiovisual technologies have developed to become a vital didactic tool in the ESL classroom, not only in terms of their role as conveyers of language input, (Lightbown & Spada cited in Bahrani et al. 1718), but also in terms of their ability to capture students' interest. The positive trend in youth's practices of borrowing texts from libraries (Jensen cited in Tønnessen 20-21), indicates that young learners are exploring stories in many forms, and consequently, their transmedial interests need to be maintained and nourished in the classroom. By enabling students to learn how a narrative can be experienced differently through Hutcheon's modes of engagement (Hutcheon 23-27), their interest in the storyworld of a work of fiction may be strengthened, and their experiences with one mode of engagement might inspire them to explore others.

In the introductory chapter to *Children's Literature in Second Language Education* (2012), Janice Bland uses Prensky's influential term "Digital Natives" and maintains that the current student population of second language learners has grown accustomed to the multimodal nature of many contemporary texts (Bland in Bland & Lütge 5). In regard to the nature of multimodal

texts, she further elaborates that multimodality allows students a choice of reading path instead of simply adhering to traditional linear reading (Ibid). Furthermore, similar to how Stallings aims to solidify the connection between students' private lives and the classroom through aspects of "pop pedagogy" (Stallings in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 13), Bland argues that the texts used in second language classrooms need to extend beyond monomodal texts, so that students may identify a connection between the language classroom and their recreational world (Bland in Bland & Lütge 5). By working with different types of literature and texts, Bland suggests that students learn to understand their world story by story, consequently acquiring various competences along with their development of language acquisition (Ibid). Furthermore, Bland's emphasis on the merits of the literary story world is shared by advocates of the "transportation theory" such as Green, Brock, and Kaufman, and Gerrig. In terms of the act of becoming transported, she argues that "learning to enter a story imaginatively and mindfully" (5-6), should be acknowledged as an essential competence in the classroom (Bland in Bland & Lütge 5-6).

The ideas presented and discussed by Bland (2012), such as the importance of narrative exploration and transportation, as well as the need for multimodality in the second language classroom, mirror the Norwegian national curriculum's philosophy on concepts such as the act of reading and the nature of texts (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8; Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D). Hence, I maintain that Bland's argumentation presents valid considerations that need to be acknowledged by ESL educators in Norway. By working with multimodal texts, and examining multimodality as a concept, students can experience how technology influences our textual practices and alters our ideas of what constitutes a text. Additionally, by becoming acquainted with multimodality and the extended idea of text, students also develop their basic skills, which contribute to their development of competence in the English subject and helps them to relate critically to different types of information (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 5, 8). While there are many ways to explore multimodality, I argue for the potential of fantasy portrayals, which I believe can serve as connectors between students' pop cultural experiences and their academic experiences with texts in the ESL classroom. By introducing different works of popular fantasy through audiovisual methods as well as printed media, students can make use of narrow reading in order to develop their second language acquisition as well as working towards fulfilling different aims of the national curriculum.

#### 5.4.4 Narrow Reading

As a majority of modern-day ESL students spend their spare time exploring different types of storyworlds across media, recreational reading of different types of texts has become a regular part of the daily agenda. In “Free Voluntary reading: New Research, Applications, and Controversies”, originally presented at the 2004 Regional language center (RELIC) conference in Singapore, Stephen Krashen presents his ideas and theories regarding the importance of recreational reading and further argues for its influence on literary development. In terms of free voluntary reading, or recreational reading, Krashen argues that the concept’s positive effects on linguistic and literary development are not restricted to first language acquisition but also apply to second language development (Krashen B 1). With regard to different methods of reading, Krashen challenges some traditionally held beliefs, and speculates whether narrow reading, rather than wide reading, could serve as an efficient method for second language acquisition (Krashen B 4). Narrow reading means that language learners focus on a particular literary genre or author, rather than on literary plurality. Because the content of narrow reading is closer to their own interests and preexisting knowledge, Krashen argues that their reading may prove more interesting and comprehensible for readers (Krashen B 4).

However, Krashen’s positive approach towards light reading in second language development, contradicts some of the philosophical principles presented in other academic works, such as *Tell me: Children, reading and talk* (1996) by Aidan Chambers. Though not addressing second language development in particular, Chambers nevertheless questions the efficacy of narrow reading, and deems repetitious reading of any one kind of book, or books written by one author only, as “flat-earth” reading (Chambers 5). According to Chambers, a “flat-earth” may be oblivious to the diverse and multifaceted nature of the world, and similarly fear to cross the boundaries of his or her own familiar experiences (Chambers 5). Although Chamber’s description of “flat-earth reading” is not directly connected to language acquisition, it nevertheless raises an interesting question regarding the potential limitations of narrow reading. Although Krashen adheres to the notion that challenging texts are indeed needed in order to master academic language, he further theorizes that light reading can be a bridge towards heavier reading (Krashen B 5).

In “Extensive Reading, Narrow Reading and second language learners: implications for libraries” (2011), Sharon Bryan presents and examines part of the body of literature on

extensive reading and narrow reading, and concludes that the evidence suggests that both techniques can be effective and beneficial in second language development (113). While Bryan's reflections regarding library practices are beyond the scope of this literature review, her examination of extensive and narrow reading theories presented by authors such as Krashen and Dee Gardner provides a comprehensive overview of the core aspects of these two different types of reading. According to Gardner, Narrow Reading as a concept is deeply connected to the Input Hypothesis initially presented by Krashen, and maintains the idea that exposure to meaningful texts can eventually lead to incidental language acquisition (Gardner cited in Bryan 117). Furthermore, a fundamental argument of Narrow Reading, initially presented by Kyung-Sook Cho, Kyoung-Ok Ahn, and Stephen Krashen, is that a shared context across a variety of texts will enhance the possibility for incidental learning (Cho, Ahn, & Krashen cited in Bryan 117). According to Krashen, a first or second language is primarily acquired through exposure, therefore the more one is exposed to a set of words within a specific context the more likely it is that one acquires an understanding of these words (Krashen cited in Bryan 115). While Krashen's ideas and theories regarding second language acquisition have provided an important foundation within second language research, his theories connected to the Input Hypothesis have been widely debated, and have been met with both approval as well as criticism during the past 30 years (Bahrani et al. 1714).

Although Krashen's hypothesis about the positive influence of recreational reading on literary development has been questioned, and his further speculations regarding the linguistic benefits of narrow reading have been debated, I argue that narrow reading can be a beneficial component in the ESL classroom. While it has been claimed that narrow reading might bring about positive linguistic effects (Gardner cited in Bryan 117; Krashen cited in Bryan 115), I also argue that narrow reading might be a valuable component in developing some students' joy of reading. By working with the fantasy genre in the ESL classroom, students can academically experience a genre that has become a well-integrated part of their own youth culture, and understand that many of their own literary interests are worthy of acknowledgement and study. I believe the diversity of the genre provides students with a variety of literary options, while simultaneously connecting them to something that is to some degree culturally familiar. Moreover, while I understand and respect Chambers' fear of the influences of "flat-earth" reading (Chambers 5), I agree with Krashen's proposition that light reading can be a bridge towards later, heavier reading (Krashen 5). Ultimately, as teachers we need to preserve and develop students' interest in reading, and I argue that I would rather have a student read "narrowly" for a time period and

enjoy the literary experience, than to deprive him/her of that option, and potentially see the joy of reading fade away. I am not suggesting that works of fantasy ought to replace the curriculum, nor am I saying that fantasy is a key to all difficulties of ESL teaching, I am merely indicating that by incorporating fantasy to some degree in the classroom, we might enhance language acquisition to a certain degree.

## **5.5 Multiliteracies**

In the government report “St.meld. nr. 030 (2003-2004) - Kultur for læring” distributed by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, it is emphasized that the basic skills of the Norwegian school system are equivalent to the English notion of literacy, which extends far beyond the ability to simply read and write (The Norwegian Government B, no pages). In the “Framework for basic skills”, it furthermore states that the five basic skills, i.e. oral skills, reading, writing, numeracy, and digital skills, are all fundamental to learning in all subjects and serve as “prerequisite for the pupil to show his/her competence and qualifications” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 5). In accordance with the nature of the curriculum, I argue that students are in need of multiliteracies in order to meet the aims that are set out for them, and in the following sections, I will review a number of texts on multiliteracies and discuss whether the ideas presented are in any way viable in a Norwegian ESL context.

### **5.5.1 The Nature of Multiliteracies**

In *Teaching and Learning Multiliteracies: Changing Times, Changing Literacies* (2006), Michèle Anstey and Geoff Bull provide a systematic and thorough description of the history and nature of multiliteracies, and argue for the merits of incorporating multiliteracies in pedagogical contexts. While the term literacy has traditionally been used to refer to a person’s ability to read and write, the technological and sociocultural changes that have occurred during the last twenty years have made it necessary to redefine the traditional interpretation of literacy (Anstey & Bull A 19). Anstey and Bull maintain that the changing nature of texts and the growing presence of multimodality, have led to an increasingly multifaceted understanding of literacy and literate practices, and consequently led to the development of new definitions of literacy (Ibid). For instance, in “Literate futures: Review of literacy education” (2000) Allan Luke and Peter Freebody provide the following definition: “Literacy is the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with texts of traditional and new



communications technologies via spoken, print, and multimedia” (Luke & Freebody cited in Anstey & Bull A 19).

Although Luke and Freebody’s definition captures part of the essence of 21st century literacy, Anstey and Bull argue that it completely eludes the social context of literacy, i.e., the literate practices of everyday life (Anstey & Bull A 20). A literate person is in need of both knowledge and skills in order to operate successfully within the various contexts where literacy is used, and the concept of multiliteracies attempts to address this subject (ibid). In the midst of a myriad of changes brought about by technological advancements, globalization, and social diversity, the concept “multiliteracies” was coined by the New London Group as a response to how literacy teaching should equip students for the changing world they inhabit (Anstey & Bull A 19, 20). In accordance with the changing nature of texts and other cultural developments, Anstey and Bull argue that students need to develop the capacity to produce, read, and interpret print, spoken language, and multimedia texts, in addition to acquiring the skills, strategies, and practices needed in order to adapt to both recreational and academic contexts (Anstey & Bull 19). Namely, students need to be literate in multiple modes as well as being able to use appropriate literate practices across various contexts (Anstey & Bull A 20-21). Ergo, the multi in multiliteracies refers to the necessity of having “multiple forms of knowledge and understandings about literacy and social contexts that enable appropriate and successful performance in all aspects of life” (Anstey & Bull A 21). Ultimately, Anstey and Bull summarize that mastering multiliteracies means being cognitively and socially literate in terms of the expanded idea of text, as well as being strategic; i.e., recognizing what is required in a specific context, examining what is known, and if necessary, modifying one’s previous knowledge to develop a strategy that suits the context and situation (Anstey & Bull A 23).

While the examples and arguments put forth by Anstey and Bull are predominantly situated around native speaking contexts, with examples obtained from Australian classrooms and curricula, I maintain that the ideas presented in their book could also be incorporated within an ESL framework. The technological, cultural, and social changes described by Anstey and Bull have occurred on a global basis, and the effects of these changes have influenced the lives of countless individuals around the globe. Consequently, the need for multiliteracies is not restricted to native English speakers, but is also an important aspect to consider in regards to second language users. Furthermore, the nature of multiliteracies, which emphasizes the importance of being cognitively and socially literate in terms of the expanded idea of a text, and likewise addresses the need for developing multiple forms of knowledge (Anstey & Bull A

20-21, 23), mirror the philosophy of literacy described in the National curriculum and “Framework for basic skills”.

### **5.5.2 Literacy and Discourse Worlds**

Literacy is a complex and dynamic concept, which has been part of numerous pedagogical discussions for the last 20 years, and in regard to the enigmatic nature of literacy, Anstey and Bull suggest that literate practices are all inextricably linked with social and cultural life and experiences (Anstey and Bull A 34). Anstey and Bull’s argument is mirrored by other academics such as Karin Tusting, who likewise asserts that all literate practices may be interpreted as a reflection of a learner’s socio-cultural processes and knowledge (Tusting cited in Anstey & Bull A 34). Furthermore, David Barton, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanic maintain that as students grow and develop through their childhood years and adolescent lives, their life experiences provide them with a repertoire of resources about literacy and literate practices, and these experiences together contribute to influence and shape each student’s overall identity (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, cited in Anstey & Bull A 34). While students gather life experiences through interaction and participation within all areas of life, related experiences eventually form domains within each student’s identity, and the students employ these domains in order to make meaning and engage in different literary practices (Barton et al. cited in Anstey & Bull A 34). Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope define these domains as “discourse worlds”, and further state that there are two worlds in particular that prove fundamental in students’ literary development: the “Lifeworld” and the “School-based world” (Cope & Kalantzis cited in Anstey & Bull A 34). While the school-based world consists of students’ educational experiences within the school context, the lifeworld encompasses all that exists outside of school (Cope & Kalantzis cited in Anstey & Bull A 34). In their earlier work *The Literacy labyrinth* (2004) Anstey and Bull proposed that these discourse worlds ultimately contribute to shape an individual’s literacy identity, which can be interpreted as an “intersection of knowledge and experience with literacy” gathered from both the school-based world and the lifeworld (Anstey & Bull cited in Anstey & Bull A 34).

As learners encounter different literate experiences through various types of discourse worlds, their encounters alter and influence their identities (Barton et al. cited in Anstey & Bull A 34; Cope & Kalantzis cited in Anstey & Bull A 34). I am interested in whether there is a way to connect aspects of students’ “Lifeworld” and the “School-based world” in order to positively

influence the development of their literacy identity (Anstey & Bull cited in Anstey & Bull A 34)? In regard to this question, I believe one possible answer lies within the educational potential of fantasy narratives across media. By incorporating and working with fantasy stories in an ESL context, we provide students with an opportunity to academically study and analyze elements that are both part of youth culture as well as literary history. As previously emphasized by Stallings in “Pop Pedagogy”, working with elements of pop culture can aid students in developing their analytical skills, and further encourage them to make analytical connections between works encountered in class (School-based world), and in their spare time (Lifeworld) (Stallings in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 12). In addition, the core curriculum’s aim of maintaining a balance between stimulating and exploiting elements of youth culture, while simultaneously providing students with a cultural counterweight, provides ample opportunity for combining different aspects of students’ “School-based worlds” and “Lifeworlds” (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training A 31).

As learners move between the “Lifeworld” and the “school-based world”, they will also encounter multiple types of texts, which all incorporate different semiotic systems. In *Evolving Pedagogies: Reading and Writing in a Multimodal World* (2010), Anstey and Bull maintain that it is the codes and conventions of the semiotic systems that enable us to make meaning. They list five semiotic systems: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial (Anstey & Bull B 2). While Anstey and Bull grant that texts delivered through traditional communications technologies, such as live or paper technologies, have employed several semiotic systems for some time, they also give examples of how that technology has facilitated the production of multimodal texts to a large degree and consequently influenced our perception of literacy (2, 4). The effects of technological advancements and the dynamic nature of the expanded idea of text have had a profound influence on concepts related to literacy, reading, and writing, and while texts are becoming increasingly diverse, learners need to recognize and embrace this diversity (Anstey & Bull B 4). According to Anstey and Bull, writers now need to be aware of, and be capable of using all five semiotic systems, and acknowledge how each system may be combined in different manners in order to achieve different outcomes (B 4). In parallel with notions of writing, concepts of reading are likewise shifting, as the act of reading now includes the use of numerous semiotic systems, where the reader must both acknowledge the various systems and understand the relationships between the systems (Ibid). In order to exemplify a fragment of these changes, Anstey and Bull clarify that current readers “are as much viewers and listeners as they are readers of the printed word” (B 4), and further they elaborate that just

as readers must have knowledge of linguistic texts, readers of multimodal texts need to acquire an understanding of the grammar and conventions that accompany the reading of visual and audio text (Ibid).

The expanded idea of text mentioned in the “Framework of basic skills” and the English subject curriculum (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8; Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D), corresponds well with the changing nature of literacy, reading, and writing described by Anstey and Bull (B 4); however, as each semiotic system represents a different way of making meaning, is there a possibility that the presence of semiotic diversity may enhance the educational environment of the ESL classroom? As all language learners acquire knowledge differently, and have different preferences regarding their favored semiotic system, presenting students with a semiotic diversity may help to support differentiation by catering to various learner needs. Furthermore, Anstey and Bull’s description of the close proximity between experiences of reading, watching, and hearing in today’s society (B 4), calls to mind how learners likewise engage with stories in various ways through Hutcheon’s modes of engagement (Hutcheon 22). By letting students experience and work with the different modes of engagement in the classroom, they will also experience multiple semiotic systems, which will further help them to develop and acquire an understanding of the grammar and conventions that accompany different types of text (Anstey & Bull B 4).

### **5.5.3 Literacy and Literature across Social Spaces in a Multiliterate World.**

Ernest Morell describes the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the home of a “communications revolution”, where the mechanics by which we access and produce information has changed beyond recognition, and his thoughts are further mirrored by Bronwyn Williams who asserts that modern literary practices are currently being fundamentally altered (Morell 300; Williams 682). In order to ensure that the classroom is perceived as a relevant and fulfilling aspect of students’ lives, it is therefore essential that teachers and educators acknowledge the changes that are occurring beyond the borders of the classroom, and that they help their students understand and work in a rapidly growing multiliterate world (Anstey & Bull, preface VIII). In “Reconceptualising literacy: Critical multiliteracies for “new times” (2013) Susan Sandretto and Jane Tilson discuss the nature and merits of multiliteracies, and argue for the importance of establishing a bridge between the literacies students use outside of school and the literacies used within school (4). Sandretto and Tilson’s arguments are founded on earlier academic publications regarding the subject, which maintain that students’ experiences with literacies

outside of the school context are shaped by “funds of knowledge” developed in various social spaces, such as at home, in peer groups, as well as within communities and in popular culture (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo cited in Sandretto & Tilson 4; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez cited in Sandretto & Tilson 4).

Learners’ various experiences with literacy across different social spaces are likewise discussed by Professor Len Unsworth in “Multiliteracies, E-literature and English Teaching” (2008), where he considers the role of narratives in regard to multiliteracies and popular culture. According to Unsworth, the vast impact of information and communication technologies has greatly influenced the nature of literary narratives for children, as well as altered the contexts in which children encounter and experience these narratives (Unsworth 62). To elucidate this phenomenon, Unsworth discusses the widespread success of J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* franchise, which has demonstrated how literary narratives can engage the enthusiasm of youths worldwide and displayed how an immersive story world can lead to multiple interactions across various media platforms (62). As children and young adults explore various online aspects of different story worlds, such as websites devoted to fanfiction, fan discussions etc., they will need to utilize multiple literacies in order to operate successfully (Ibid). However, while many members of the younger generation prosper within digital environments, Unsworth argues that there is an evident “intergenerational digital divide” between many teachers and students in the English classroom, and as a response proposes children’s literature as a potential way of bridging the gap (63). Unsworth concludes that the pedagogic potential of E-literature and online literary resources is obvious, and argues that by working with such elements it is possible to combine the complementary expertise and experience of both children and teachers in their shared enjoyment of literary narratives and story worlds (Unsworth 64,70).

In the section of his article entitled “Organisational framework”, which intends to provide teachers and other readers with a basis to discuss literacy understanding in a digital age (71-72), Unsworth briefly mentions the concept of electronically “augmented” literary texts. An electronically augmented literary text is described as a piece of literature which has only been published in book format, but is nevertheless augmented with online resources that “enhance and extend the story world of the book” (Unsworth 64). The online resources may vary in terms of both content and structure, and can consequently offer a wide selection of activities to pursue both online and offline for both mature and young readers. While some literary texts are augmented with relatively simple online resources such as online quizzes and/or supplementary information about the characters in the text (Unsworth 65), others provide more unorthodox

and immersive options. In the fantasy book series *Spirit Animals* published by Scholastic, readers are introduced to a vast fantasy universe which can be explored in book form as well as online. While the readers can follow the adventures of the various protagonists in the books, they are also provided with a key which allows them to log in to Scholastic's publisher's webpage, create their own characters and partake in an online adventure game (Stiefvater preface). To a certain extent, *Spirit Animals* offers a hybrid experience, where the traditional book format is combined with online gameplay experiences in an interactive adventure.

While Sandretto and Tilson elaborate on the subject of discourse worlds by emphasizing the need to establish a bridge between the literacies of the "Lifeworld" and literacies of the "School-based world" (Sandretto & Tilson 4), Unsworth argues for the pedagogical potential of narratives in regard to the development of multiliteracies. The hypothesis put forth by Unsworth further provides a constructive foundation for the incorporation of different types of fantasy texts in the ESL classroom, where the texts may collectively enable learners to develop different literacies through various experiences with literary narratives and story worlds. Furthermore, the concept of electronically augmented literary texts (Unsworth 64), displays but a mere fraction of technology's influence on the nature of literary publications, and book series such as *Spirit Animals* (2013-) provide readers with a hybrid experience, combining the immersive natures of the "Participatory mode" and "Telling mode" initially proposed by Hutcheon (Hutcheon 22-23, 25, 27). The vast scope and engaging structure of the books' interactive game element may provide readers with a cognitively challenging but also rewarding and appealing experience.

## **6 Discussion**

In this review I set out to reveal what current international research says about the uses of popular culture (e.g. the fantasy genre) in transmedial formats as an educational tool, with a particular emphasis on language acquisition. Furthermore, I wished to address how this research could be related to the English subject curriculum presented in the Norwegian National Curriculum- The Knowledge Promotion 2006, and to discover what implications it might have for Norwegian ESL teaching. In order to locate and examine current, viable research I made use of five interrelated key concepts, namely narrative theory, fantasy, transmedia storytelling, language acquisition, and multiliteracies.

Within narrative theory, the ideas presented by Emmott (2010), Gerrig (1993), and Green et al. (2004) acknowledged the multifaceted nature of cognitive aspects of narratology, and argued for the benefits of narrative transportation across different media. The concept of narrative transportation, and the importance of messages in second language development, was further discussed by Krashen (A 2005), who addressed the significance of compelling and comprehensible input in regard to language acquisition. Ultimately, these texts support the didactic use of narratives across media by advocating for the positive effects of narrative transportation, which can aid students in developing linguistically while at the same time sustaining their joy of reading (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D) and influencing their motivation.

Within discussions of fantasy, texts by Nikolajeva (2006), James (2012), Laetz & Johnston (2008), and Hirsjärvi (2006), described how the genre had developed from its traditional roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic Movement, and blossomed to become a 21<sup>st</sup> century transmedial phenomenon permeating the popular culture of nations worldwide. Further, the educational potential of popular material in native speaking settings, as discussed by Stallings (2012), Grey (2012), and Ford (2012), was discussed in terms of its validity in the ESL context, and connected to the aims and philosophies of the Norwegian National Curriculum. Ultimately, the discussion provided justifiable support and argumentation for the inclusion of popular material in the Norwegian ESL classroom.

Within transmedia storytelling, Jenkins (2010) and Hayati (2012) elaborated on the multifaceted media landscape that students regularly encounter, and provided reasonable indications that transmedia storytelling is a viable didactic tool. Further, Tønnessen (2014) and Mackey (2010) continued the discussion of media by advocating for the advantages of media adaptations, which is similarly supported in the National curriculum where it is stated that students ought to become acquainted with the extended idea of text (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training C 8; Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training D). Moreover, Aarseth (2010), Ryan (2010) and Brown's (2008) discussions and notions related to the narrative dimensions of video games add to the discussion of whether video games can ever be implemented in the classroom in order to promote untraditional narratives and language learning. Finally, Hutcheon's modes of engagement were presented as representatives of the diversity of modern storytelling, and discussed in terms of how they can help ESL students develop basic skills and function as a bridge between students' pop cultural experiences and the classroom.

Within language acquisition, Bahrani et al. (2014) and Lundahl's (2009) elaborate discussions on the significance of linguistic input, and the natures of formal and informal language learning, are used to support the creation of "hybrid experiences" in the ESL classroom, where students bridge the gaps between their recreational English activities and their academic use of English. Consequently, Lundahl asserts that teachers need to become acquainted with the knowledge that students establish outside of school, and understand how this relates to the forms of knowledge situated at school (46). Further, the didactic potential of informal language learning and audiovisual technologies are discussed in terms of their positive effects on both linguistic development, and their potential contributions to the joy of reading that is supposed to be instilled by the English curriculum. Moreover, Bland's (2012) emphasis on the importance of multimodality in the second language classroom mirrors both the ideas presented by advocates of the transportation theory, as well as the national curriculum's philosophy on concepts such as the act of reading and the nature of texts. Finally, ideas discussed by Krashen (B 2004), Chambers (1996), and Bryan (2011), concerning the educational value of narrow reading and its influence on linguistic and literary development were reviewed and connected to the fantasy genre and the aims of the National Curriculum.

Within multiliteracies, Anstey and Bull's (A 2006) elaborate description of the history and nature of multiliteracies as a concept was outlined at length and ultimately related to the Norwegian ESL context. Further, Anstey and Bull's summary of various researchers' ideas on the relationship between literacy and discourse worlds, and their observations and thoughts surrounding semiotic diversity (B 2010) were also connected to the Norwegian Core curriculum and the English subject curriculum. Finally, learners' various experiences with literacy across different social spaces were discussed by Sandretto & Tilson (2013) as well as by Unsworth (2008), where the latter advocated for the pedagogical potential of narratives in regard to the development of multiliteracies. Unsworth's hypothesis was lastly connected to the fantasy genre and the ESL classroom, before the book series *Spirit Animals* (2013-) was mentioned as an example of technology's influences on printed media. Ultimately, the various texts helped to illustrate that the need for multiple literacies is not restricted to native speaking contexts, but is also important within second language acquisition.

## **7 Conclusion**



I began this thesis by quoting the famed fantasy author Lloyd Alexander, who once proclaimed that “Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It’s a way of understanding it” (Alexander cited in Hamilton 4). Initially, Alexander’s quote merely reminded me of Nikolajeva’s description of fantasy (62), but as I progressed further in the process of writing this thesis, it became something greater. Alexander’s apt description of fantasy has become a mantra of a literary genre, which has evolved from its humble origins to be warmly embraced by the “square-eyed” generation of young ESL learners. Whether their interest in the genre was initially ignited by books, illustrated novels, films, or video games, does not matter at all because many pupils have developed a transmedial love of fantasy.

Accordingly, through this literature review, I have attempted to find answers that can help to potentially improve or enhance the learning environment and literary experiences of young ESL students. I have argued for the benefits of working with multiple types of narratives in educational settings. Ultimately, by exploring the potential of popular fantasy portrayals across different media, I argue that students can be helped in meeting the core aims of the English subject curriculum. By exploring familiar cultural aspects in the ESL classroom, students may develop both linguistically and psychologically, and use their knowledge of aspects of popular culture to develop and grow. In order to meet the numerous competence aims set for them, students will need not only linguistic skills, but also a motivation to learn, and I believe popular culture and fantasy may be a way of building this motivation. The openness or ambiguity of the English curriculum enables teachers to employ aspects of popular culture as teaching tools in the ESL classroom, and to aid students in seeing the relevance of their studies in their everyday lives (Stallings in Dial-driver, Emmons, & Ford 12).

Lastly, I would like to point out that due to the scope of this thesis, and the limited time I had available to research and write, it was necessary to select from a mass of relevant literature, which means that I have perhaps failed to include important research. Although the theories presented in this thesis are not without potential weaknesses and criticisms, I have attempted my uttermost to provide an unbiased, fair representation of the selected literature. Ultimately, these texts seem to indicate that popular material such as fantasy narratives have an educational potential in the ESL classroom.

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